

Byzantium and the Avars, 6th–9th Century AD

East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450

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Byzantium and the Avars, 6th–9th Century AD

Political, Diplomatic and Cultural Relations

By

Georgios Kardaras



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Cover illustration: The so-called “victorious prince”. Detail from the vessel no. 2 of the Nagyszentmiklós hoard (Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum). Photograph by Wolfgang Sauber, from Wikimedia Common – CC BY-SA 4.0.

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

To my Austrian “parents”

*Peter Zeilinger †
Annemarie Andritz*



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Preface

The present work is a revised translation of my published in Greek monograph: *Byzantium and the Avars, 6th–9th c. A.D. Political, Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (NHRF/IBR, Monographs 15), Athens 2010, based on my dissertation at the University of Ioannina. I have to note that in the course of the last decade, the scientific production on the Avars was really out of any expectation and it continues with ever more greater dynamic thanks to a new generation of researchers particularly in Central Europe. Nonetheless, the topic “Avars” concerns today scholars all over the world. Regarding my work, the greater part of time was devoted not to the typical translation of a text but to the study and the enrichment of the prototype with the new research data provided in the last decade. On the other hand, many older works were replaced.

Maybe is not right to repeat here all of the thanks regarding the Greek version of the book. As researcher at the IHR/NHRF in Athens I have to express first my thanks to the Director of the Institute, Professor Taxiarchis Kolias and the Emeritus Researcher Telemachos Lounghis for their constant support to my work at the Institute. The same I due to the former Director, Emeritus Researcher Kriton Chrysochoidis for his permission to translate the monograph for Brill Publishing House. Further, my thanks concern Professor Florin Curta who read the English manuscript and his corrections and valuable observations brought the text to its final version. I am also greatly obliged to Emeritus Professor P. Golden, Dr. Peter Somogyi as well as the researchers Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáská (Leipzig) and Ádam Bollók (Budapest) who read some chapters of the book and helped me with their suggestions and bibliographical information. Special thanks I own to other colleagues who contributed with their way to my effort: Prof. Katalin Pintér-Nagy (University of Szeged), Prof. Panos Sophoulis (University of Athens), Researcher Maria Leontsini (INR/NHRF), Dr. Pantelis Charalampakis and Dr. Ioanna Tzifa. I am also indebted to Marcella Mulder, Elisa Perotti and Gert Jager at Brill Publishing House for their implicit support at the publication process. During the work I was benefited from a DAAD research fellowship in Leipzig, I express also my gratitude. Finally, I would like to thank once more my family for all they have done for me.

Georgios Kardaras

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Abbreviations

1 Sources, Scientific Series, Journals

AAASH	<i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> (Budapest, 1951ff.)
AAC	<i>Acta Archaeologica Carpathica</i> (Cracow, 1958–1959ff.)
Abhandlungen Bayer. Ak.	Abhandlungen der Bayer. Ak. der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse, N. F. (München)
Abhandlungen Göttingen	Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse, dritte Folge (Göttingen)
ACHCByz	Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance (Paris)
AEMA	<i>Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi</i> (Wiesbaden, 1975ff.)
AO	<i>Acta Orientalia</i> (Budapest, 1950–1951ff.)
APH	<i>Acta Poloniae Historica</i> (Wrocław/Warsaw, 1958)
BBA	Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten (Berlin)
BHS	Berliner Historische Studien (Berlin, 1980ff.)
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i> (Cambridge, 1975ff.)
BS	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i> (Prague, 1929ff.)
Byz	<i>Byzantion</i> (Brussels, 1924ff.)
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i> (München, 1892ff.)
CAJ	<i>Central Asiatic Journal</i> (Wiesbaden, 1955)
Carmi	<i>Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia</i> , ed. L. Tartaglia, Torino 1998
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae (Series Washingtoniensis, Washington D.C., 1967ff.); (Series Berolinensis, Berlin/New York, 1967ff.); (Series Vindobonensis, Vienna, 1975ff.); (Series Italica, Rome, 1975ff.); (Series Bruxellensis, Brussels, 1975ff.)
CIC	Corpus Iuris Civilis
CRAI	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres</i> (Paris, 1857ff.)
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Paris, 1903ff.)
CSHB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae (Bonn, 1828–1897)
Dissertationes Archaeologicae	<i>Dissertationes Archaeologicae ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae</i> Ser. 3. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, Institute of Archaeological Sciences
DÖAW	Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Wien)

<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> (Washington D.C., 1941ff.)
<i>DOT</i>	Dumbarton Oaks Texts
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i> (Cambridge, Mass., 1958ff.)
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> (Ann Arbor, 1849ff.)
<i>JÖB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i> (Wien, 1969ff.)
<i>MAA</i>	Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica (Budapest)
<i>MAIUAW</i>	Mitteilungen des Archäologischen Instituts der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Budapest)
<i>MFA/SAA</i>	Monographien zur Frühgeschichte und Mittelalterarchäologie/ Studien zu Archäologie der Awaren (Innsbruck)
<i>MGH</i>	Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Hannover/Berlin, 1826ff.)
<i>MGH, Epistolae 4</i>	<i>MGH, Epistolae 4</i> (Epistolae Karolini aevi 2), ed. E. Dümmler. Berlin: Weidmann, 1895
<i>MGH, AA 5/1</i>	<i>MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi 5/1</i> (Iordanis, <i>Romana et Getica</i>), ed. Th. Mommsen. Berlin: Weidmann, 1882
<i>MGH, AA 11</i>	<i>MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi 11</i> (Chronica Minora 2), ed. Th. Mommsen. Berlin: Weidmann, 1894
<i>MGH, Conc. 2, no. 1</i>	<i>MGH, Concilia</i> vol. 2 no. 1 (Concilia aevi Karolini 1, no. 1), ed. A. Werminghoff. Hannover/Leipzig: Hahn, 1906
<i>MGH, SRG 13</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi</i> vol. 13, ed. B. Krusch. Hannover: Hahn, 1920. (SS rer. Germ.)
<i>MGH, SRLI</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX</i> , ed. L. Bethmann and G. Weitz. Hannover: Hahn, 1878. (SS rer. Lang.)
<i>MGH, SRM 1, no. 1</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i> vol. 1 no. 1, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison. Hannover: Hahn, 1951. (SS rer. Merov.)
<i>MGH, SRM 2</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i> vol. 2, ed. B. Krusch. Hannover: Hahn, 1888
<i>MGH, SRM 6</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i> vol. 6 (Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum Aevi Merovingici). ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison. Hannover/Leipzig: Hahn, 1913
<i>MGH, SS 1</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores</i> vol. 1, ed. G. H. Pertz. Hannover: Hahn, 1826
<i>MGH, SS 2</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores</i> vol. 2, ed. G. H. Pertz. Hannover: Hahn, 1829
<i>MGH, SS 13</i>	<i>MGH, Scriptores</i> vol. 13, ed. G. Waitz. Hannover: Hahn, 1881
<i>MIÖG</i>	Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung
Monographien der RGZM	Monographien der Römische-Germanischen Zentralmuzeums
<i>Poetae Latini 1</i>	<i>MGH, Poetae Latini aevi Carolini</i> , vol. 1, ed. E. Dümmler. Berlin: Weidmann, 1881

PG	<i>Patrologia Cursus completus, series Graeca (Patrologia Graeca)</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857–1866)
REB	<i>Revue des Études Byzantines</i> (Paris, 1944ff.)
RESEE	<i>Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes</i> (București, 1963ff.)
SBS	<i>Studies in Byzantine Sigillography</i> (Dumbarton Oaks, 1987ff.)
SSCIAM	<i>Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo</i> (Spoleto, 1954ff.)
TM	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i> (Paris, 1965ff.)
VAH	<i>Varia Archaeologica Hungarica</i> (Budapest)
VAHD	<i>Vjesnik za Arheologiju i Historiju Dalmatinsku</i> (Split, 1878ff.)
VV	<i>Vizantiiskii Vremmenik</i> , vols. 1–25 (St Petersburg, 1894–1927); n.s. (Moscow, 1947ff.)
Vyz	<i>Vyzantina</i> (Thessalonike, 1969ff.)
WdS	<i>Die Welt der Slawen</i> (Wiesbaden, 1956ff.)
ZRVI	<i>Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta</i> (Belgrade, 1952ff.)

2 Collaborative Volumes, Conferences, Online Resources

- Acta II: Das heidnische und christliche Slaventum. Acta II Congressus internationalis historiae Slavicae Salisburgo-Ratisbonensis anno 1967 celebrati*, ed. F. Zagiba (Annales Instituti Slavici 5). Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz.
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A Note on Transliteration

Greek personal names and place names have been transliterated directly from their Greek forms except where a Latinate or Anglicized version is well known: therefore Nikephoros, Axiopolis, Beroe, but Justinian, Adrianople, Thrace. For transliterations of bibliography, names and place names from Russian follow the Congress System, using *sh, zh, ch, shch, ia* etc. instead of *š, ž, č, šč, j*. The same method for Bulgarian, where also *ǎ* instead of *u*. Place names in Romania and Hungary follow current Romanian or Hungarian usage.

Introduction

1 Avars and Byzantine-Avar Relations: The Current State of Research

Despite its rather long presence, at least by medieval standards (from 568 to 796), the history of the Avar khaganate did not attract scholarly attention until recently. Denis Sinor was quite right when he noted in 1963 that “the history of the Avars is not yet written.”¹ Sinor’s view was fully justified, as the history of the Avars was usually treated as a separate chapter or section in studies dealing with the steppe peoples in general. By 1970, there were still no monographs or synthetic studies of the abundant written and archaeological evidence pertaining to the Avar khaganate, which could serve as a point of reference for future research on the presence of the Avars in Central Europe.

One of the reasons for this scholarly indifference may have been that the study of Avar history and culture concerned mostly those countries that included the territories once within the Avar khaganate, particularly Hungary, Slovakia and Austria. In most other countries in Central Europe or in the Balkans, the interest was limited to specific issues relevant to the history of their modern national territory, such as Avar attacks or the Avar cultural influences on the Slavs. Furthermore, two separate schools of thought developed in Central Europe in terms of how best to study the history of the Avars in the interest of the national identity. In Slovakia, the emphasis was primarily placed on the relations between the Avars and the Slavic populations, the ultimate goal being to distinguish the purely Slavic material culture from that of the rest of the (Avar) population inside the Avar khaganate. By contrast, Hungarian scholars use to call “Avar” all finds from the Carpathian Basin that could be dated between the last quarter of the sixth and the early ninth century. They also insisted upon the cultural continuity of the area from the Huns to Avars, and later the Magyars. Regarding the Greek scholarship, studies cover the history of the Avars from 558 to 626, evidently with a focus on Avar raids on the Byzantine provinces, the conclusion of treaties between the Empire and the Avars, as well as the question of the Slavic settlements in Greece, a topic linked to the aggressive activity of the Avars against Byzantium. A first contribution to research was the study of Maria Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou on the Avar and Slavic raids during the reign of Maurice² while in the last years the author of

1 Sinor 1963, 265.

2 Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970.

this monograph has contributed many studies to the history of the Avars, as well as of the early Slavs.³

The first time the Avars made their appearance in Western historiography was in Joseph de Guignes's four-volume work on "Huns, Mongols, Turks, and other western Tartars", published in 1756–1758.⁴ In the second part of the first volume, de Guignes, relying primarily on Chinese sources, wrote about Avars in Central Asia. Their history in Europe is described from 558 to 626 and from 791 to 799, based on testimonies of the Byzantine and Latin sources. Although the coverage is patchy, de Guignes's work is of great significance for the history of the Avars, because he was the first to identify them with the Juan-Juan (Geou-gen) known from the Chinese sources. Much more detailed than de Guignes' work is a long article published in 1889 by Henry Hoyle Howorth.⁵ The "Manchester Conservative" politician-turned-historian treated the history of the Avars from their migration into Europe until their defeat by the Franks, without any time gaps. Howorth used every single Byzantine, Latin, and Syrian source at his disposal, but, despite his interest in archaeology, he ignored some of the key finds of his time, especially in Hungary. Although his interest was limited to political history, the paper provided a solid ground for future research. In 1919, the Austrian historian Ernst Stein produced a systematic study of the Byzantine-Avar relations during the reigns of Justin II and Tiberius I (565–582), as part of his *Habilitation* in Vienna.⁶ After World War I, Ludmil Hauptmann undertook the task of studying the entire period of Byzantine-Avar relations from Justinian I to Maurice (558–602).⁷

By 1930, however, the explosion of archaeological research in Hungary, and the extraordinary quality of some of the resulting finds, re-directed the interest of the scholars towards the material culture of the Avars. In one of the first significant approaches to the archaeological material, the Hungarian historian András Alföldi attempted to discern possible Byzantine influences onto the jewelry, the buckles, and the decorative motifs of the Avars, with a special emphasis on Christian symbols.⁸ In the 1930's Eugène Darkó put under scrutiny the military influences of the nomads to the Mediterranean world, including those of the Avars to Byzantium.⁹ The archaeological research on the Avars grew considerably after World War II in both Hungary and Slovakia. Names

3 See Kardaras in Bibliography.

4 De Guignes 1776, 334–366 (Les Tartares Geou-gen, ou Awares).

5 Howorth 1889.

6 Stein 1919.

7 Hauptmann 1927–1928.

8 Alföldi 1934.

9 Darkó 1935; idem 1937.

such as Ilona Kovrig, Dezső Csallány, and Jan Eisner are now associated with some of the most important discoveries of the Avar era, and to the excavation of whole cemeteries. Particularly influential, however, was the two-volume study of the Hungarian Byzantinist Gyula Moravcsik published initially in 1942–1943 in Budapest under the title *Byzantinoturcica*, and revised in 1958.¹⁰ The first volume of that monumental work contains a summary of the Avar history with a list of all the Byzantine sources pertaining to the steppe peoples, including the Avars.

Meanwhile, the Byzantine-Avar relations also constituted the object of inquiry by Polish (Gerard Labuda¹¹), Yugoslav (Franjo Barišić¹²), and Austrian historians (Arnulf Kollautz). The latter offered in 1954 the first global, synthetic view of the Avars, with an equal emphasis on their relations with Byzantium, the West, on the inner organization of the khaganate, and a survey of the most important archaeological finds. This, in turn, became the template for the subsequent monographs on the Avars. In addition, Kollautz published in 1960's papers on the Byzantine-Avar relations as well as a comprehensive bibliography on the Avars,¹³ which completed Csallány's pioneering work in that regard.¹⁴ In 1960's, two studies were published about the siege of Constantinople in 626, the first by Venance Grumel¹⁵ and the second by Andreas Stratos.¹⁶ At this early stage, very important archaeological discoveries were announced and discussed at a 1966 symposium in Nitra (Slovakia), where the emphasis was on Avar-Slavic relations.¹⁷

A true synthesis of all those partial advances in research came only in 1970, in the form of a monograph on the history of the Avars, which Arnulf Kollautz wrote together with the Japanese historian Hisayuki Miyakawa.¹⁸ Their monograph examines not only the political history, but also the material culture of the Avars, the inner organization of their society and polity, the ethnic composition of the Avar-age population, the religious beliefs and many other issues related to the Avar khaganate. Two other books were published in the 1970s on the Avars, one by the Slovak historian Alexander Avenarius¹⁹ and the other by

10 Moravcsik 1958, I–II.

11 Labuda 1950.

12 Barišić 1954.

13 Kollautz 1954; idem 1965a; idem 1965b; idem 1968.

14 Csallány 1956.

15 Grumel 1964.

16 Stratos 1967.

17 See *Študijné Zvesti* 16.

18 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970.

19 Avenarius 1974.

the Yugoslav archaeologist Jovan Kovačević.²⁰ This coincided in time with a much more systematic study of the archaeological evidence pertaining to the Avars. The Hungarian archaeologist István Bóna spelled out the results of the archaeological research in an article published in 1971, while at the same time laying out some of the directions of future research.²¹

Building on Kovrig's analysis of the Alattyán cemetery, Bóna distinguished three periods of the Avar age (Early, Middle, and Late) and touched upon numerous other issues, from the Byzantine influence upon the Avar art, to the so-called Keszthely culture, the nomadic tribes and the Slavs inside the Khaganate, or the survival of the Avars in Pannonia during the ninth century. Meanwhile, the Hungarian Byzantinist Sámuel Szádeczky-Kardoss began the compilation of all sources (Byzantine, Latin, Slavic and Oriental) pertaining to the history of the Avars.²² A collection of Latin and Byzantine sources, some of which refer to the Avars, was published in Germany during the 1970's.²³ Specialized studies continued to be published: Arnulf Kollautz's on Christian symbols in the Middle Danube region,²⁴ of Bohumila Zástěrová's on the image of Avars and the Slavs in the *Strategikon*,²⁵ etc.

During the 1980s, research on the Avars continued to develop at a very rapid pace in Hungary and Slovakia thanks to a younger generation of historians and archaeologists: Attila Kiss, Csanád Bálint, Éva Garam, Tatiana Štefanovičová, Darina Bialeková, Zlata Čilinská, and Jan Dekan. Furthermore, the Avars figured prominently in the program of several international conferences dedicated to the history of Central Europe.²⁶ A remarkable volume on Avar archaeology – particularly the most spectacular finds of gold and silver – was published in the mid-1980s.²⁷

Time was therefore ripe, slightly less than two decades after Kollautz and Miyakawa, for a new synthesis of Avar history. This came from the pen of the Austrian historian Walter Pohl.²⁸ Pohl's work is representative for what came to be known later as "Vienna School", the main purpose of which was to move away from the tenets of the national(ist) historiographies, while at the same time emphasizing the multiple ethnicities of the Avar khaganate, the het-

20 Kovačević 1977.

21 Bóna 1971.

22 Szádeczky-Kardoss, *Quellen*.

23 See *Glossar*.

24 Kollautz 1970.

25 Zástěrová 1971.

26 See *Die Bayern und ihre Nachbarn; Symposium Tutzing; Typen der Ethnogenese*.

27 See *Awaren in Europa*.

28 Pohl 1988a. See also Bibliography.

erogeneous elements that formed together its culture, as well as the cultural contacts of the Avars with the West, the Mediterranean and the East. Pohl also attempted a new approach to the ethnogenetical processes taking place into the frame of the Avar khaganate, for example the ethnogenesis of the Croats. Furthermore, he did not refer to the archaeological finds as “Avar” in an ethnic, but in a chronological sense (“Avar-age”), as he insisted upon the fact that the Avar culture represented a multitude of peoples under Avar rule.

While Walter Pohl's book established the Avars firmly in the mainstream European research on the early Middle Ages, particularly important for the interpretation of the archaeological record was (and still is) the work of the Austrian archaeologist Falko Daim, who moved the discussion about the influence of the Byzantine art motifs beyond the chronological limits of the Early Avar period. The state of research around 1990 is best reflected in two collective volumes that he edited.²⁹ Both Pohl and Daim offered two surveys of Avar history and archaeology respectively, in the collective volume entitled *Regna et Gentes*.³⁰ Equally associated with Vienna is the name and work of Peter Stadler, who introduced a number of new methods and techniques in the study of the Avar-age material, being able to classify that material and to distinguish chronological groups.³¹

Several other collective volumes were published in the 1990s and the early 21st century in Austria,³² as well as in Italy.³³ An important collective work specialized on the problems of the Middle Avar period came to light in Hungary in 2008.³⁴ Further on, the history and archaeology of the Avars is presented in more and more volumes, which nowadays describe the state-of-the-art.³⁵ Of special interest is the Nagyszentmiklós hoard, namely its cultural features and ethnic attribution,³⁶ as well as the so-called “Keszthely culture.”³⁷

Some Hungarian contributions are worth mentioning at this point, namely Éva Garam's monograph on sixth- to seventh-century Byzantine artifacts in the Avar khaganate³⁸ Csanád Bálint's on the Byzantine and steppe influences to

29 See *Awarenforschungen; Die Awaren*.

30 Pohl 2003; Daim 2003.

31 Stadler 1996b; idem 2008.

32 See *Katalog Hunnen+Awaren*.

33 See *L'oro degli Avari*.

34 See the contributions in *Antaeus* 29–30.

35 See the volumes *The Other Europe; Thesaurus Avarorum; Avars; GrenzÜbergänge; Zwischen Byzanz und der Steppe*.

36 See *Nagyszentmiklós Treasure; Sănnicolau Mare; Gold Treasure Schatz von Nagyszentmiklós*.

37 See *Keszthely-Fenékpusztja*.

38 Garam 2001.

the Avar material culture,³⁹ and Péter Somogyi's studies of Byzantine coins in the Khaganate.⁴⁰ Furthermore, a new generation of Hungarian origin scholars gave a new impetus to research in the last years. Two of them, Katalin Nagy⁴¹ and Gergely Csiky⁴² focus on Avar warfare, Ádám Bollók⁴³ on cultural interactions, Gergely Szenthe⁴⁴ on Late Avar period, while Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska offered the most complete contributions about the metalworking technologies employed inside the Khaganate.⁴⁵ For the Central-Asian past of the Avars, as well as the migrations to the west in Late Antiquity, a prominent place have the studies of Peter Golden.⁴⁶ The cultural diversity of the Avar khaganate is presented by Tivadar Vida,⁴⁷ along with his studies on the Avar pottery. An investigation of 3,500 Avar sites offers the data-base project of József Szentpéteri, quite useful on issues of periodization.⁴⁸ A new approach to the siege of Constantinople in 626 was introduced by the Slovak historian Martin Hurbanič.⁴⁹ The political and diplomatic framework of the Byzantine-Avar relations is thoroughly considered in recent studies, as those of Ecaterina Lung,⁵⁰ Edward Nicolae Luttwak,⁵¹ and Ekaterina Nechaeva.⁵²

The aim of the present monograph is to bring a contribution to the study of the relations between Byzantium and the Avars, especially after 626, when the Avars disappear from the written sources. Much of what has been so far written on the subject concerns the period 558–626. While still covering that period, I will take a critical approach to certain issues, such as the Byzantine image of the Avars, the question of whether the Avars were granted the status of federates (*foederati*) through the treaty of 558, the Turkic parameter in the Byzantine-Avar relations since the 560s, the Byzantine-Avar cooperation against the Slavs in 578 and the recruitment of mercenaries by Emperor Tiberius, the existence of a peace-loving party among the Avar dignitaries after 582, the data about Scythia Minor in the late sixth and early seventh century as

39 Bálint 1980–1981; idem 1985; idem 1992; idem 1996.

40 Somogyi 1997; idem 2008a; idem 2008b; idem 2014.

41 Nagy 2009; eadem 2010; Pintér-Nagy 2017.

42 Csiky 2015. See also the volume *War and Warfare*.

43 See Bibliography.

44 See Bibliography.

45 Heinrich-Tamáska 2005; eadem 2006; eadem 2008.

46 See *P.B. Golden*; idem 2015; See also the volumes *Central Eurasia* and *Steppe Lands*.

47 Vida 1999; idem 2008; idem 2016.

48 See *ADAM*; Szentpéteri 2008.

49 Hurbanič 2017.

50 Lung 2015.

51 Luttwak 2009.

52 Nechaeva 2007; eadem 2011; eadem 2014. For the earlier research data on the Avars see also Pohl 1988a, 10–16. idem 1988b, 251–256.

well as a minute approach on the reasons that led to the failure of the military operations of Maurice against the Avars from 592 to 602.

To study contacts between Byzantium and the Avars after 626, one needs to turn to the rich archaeological material from Avar cemeteries, and to the possibility of communication between the two sides. Artifacts or decorative motifs of Byzantine origin dated to the seventh and eighth centuries, as well as Byzantine coins struck after the reign of Heraclius have led many scholars to the right conclusion that Byzantium and the Avars continued to have contacts after 626. However, the issue has not until now been studied systematically. Although Byzantium maintained a foothold in northern Italy (the Exarchate of Ravenna) as well as in coastal areas in the Balkans (even after the settlement of the Bulgars), it is not altogether clear that the road network in these areas remained in use throughout the seventh and eighth century for trade activity, and therefore cultural contacts between Byzantium and the Avar khaganate. This issue is perhaps the most important among those with which this book deals, along with the formulation of a third assumption, regarding the Byzantine possessions in Crimea. Another important under discussion topic is that of the Christian symbols and the interpretations regarding the influence of Christianity into the Avar khaganate.

There are several other questions in modern scholarship regarding Emperor Heraclius' policy towards the Avar khaganate, the revolt of Samo against the Avars, the settlement of the Croats and the Serbs in the Balkans, and the revolt of Kubrat. The role of the Byzantine diplomacy in all those cases will be re-assessed critically by taking into account both the written sources and the geopolitical situation. The main objective is to distinguish the real dimension of the Avar factor in the frame of Heraclius' foreign policy. The last part of this book concerns warfare and the mutual influences between Byzantium and the Avars. The main research problem is the degree of the Avar influence on the armament and the tactics of the Byzantine army, as it appears in a military treatise known as the *Strategikon* of Maurice, and, furthermore, to distinguish that influence from that of other steppe peoples and of Sassanian Persia during the fifth and sixth century. Special attention will be also paid to the transmission of the art of siege from the Byzantines to the Avars, as illustrated by an episode in the *History* of Theophylact Simocatta involving a Byzantine captive to the Avars named Bousas.

2 The Image of the Avars in Byzantium

In Byzantine sources, the Avars are described with the same stereotypes that apply to other nomadic peoples: unfaithful, greedy, ugly, cruel, malicious, etc.

Such a negative portrait is a trope of the ancient ethnography, going back to Herodote's description of Scythians. The nomadic peoples were viewed in light of the opposition between the "civilized" world and the "barbarians" (called *ἔθνη* or *gentes/nationes*),⁵³ the latter living outside the geographical and cultural boundaries of the Christian Roman world and being therefore different in language, customs, or religious beliefs.⁵⁴ One of the most important differences between the two worlds is freedom, which in nomadic societies is not an individual, but a collective value related to the entire community and the way of its life. What made the freedom of the nomads palpable was the steppe, the herds of animals, the tents (yurts), the lack of luxury dwellings, the warlike spirit, and other such traits. From that point of view, sedentary people, "the others," had no freedom.⁵⁵

From the point of view of the sedentary populations, however, the only way to deal with nomads was to build extensive fortifications against them.⁵⁶ Although the Byzantine authors used to reproduce the negative stereotypes of the Greek and Roman historiography about the nomads, there are nuances worth highlighting. While the classicizing historians Procopius of Caesarea, Menander the Guardsman, and Theophylact Simocatta have a general contempt for steppe peoples (with the exception of the Hephthalites Huns, in the case of Procopius), others, such as the equally classicizing Priscus, as well as the author of the *Strategikon* have in some points a rather more positive attitude.⁵⁷

Byzantine authors were mostly interested in the political and military aspects of the Byzantine-Avar relations (raids, conflicts, exchange of embassies, and treaties), and not in any economic or cultural issues. They call the Avars by that name, but also *Scythians* and *Huns*.⁵⁸ In Western sources, the Avars appear as *Avari*, *Avares/Abares* and *Hunni*, while their country is called *Hunnia*, *Avaria*, *marcha Avarica*, *regnum Avarorum*, *partes Avariae* and *provincia* (or *terra*) *Avarorum*.⁵⁹ In Byzantium, Theophanes Confessor employs an equivalent to

53 On the relevant terms, see Garipzanov, Geary and Urbańczyk 2008, 1–14. Kasperski 2015, 201–242.

54 Simocatta, *History*, I, 3, 2, 44 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 23): These people are Huns, who dwell beside the Ister, a most untrustworthy and insatiable nation among those who live as nomads; *Strategikon*, XI, b, 360–362; Tirr 1976, 111–112; Ecsedy 1981, 204; Czeglédy 1983, 44, 77; Pohl 1988a, 1–6, 16; idem 1988b, 248–249; Pallas-Brown 2000, 310–313; Chernienko 2005, 173; Batty 2007, 264–283, 480–494; Blei 2013, 60–61; Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 364–365.

55 Stepanov 2004, 614.

56 Ibidem, 611.

57 Pallas-Brown 2000, 310, 314; Chernienko 2005, 177; Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 364–365.

58 Pohl 1988a, 4–5; idem 2003 575, 587; Sinor 2005, 4; Luttwak 2009, 156; Borri 2011, 206–207.

59 Kollautz 1969, col. 9–14; Tirr 1976, 112–113; Pohl 1988a, 309; Blei 2013, 70–73; Vida 2016, 254. On the identification of Magyars with Avars in Western sources, see Blei, op. cit., 67–70.

the name *Avaria* (Ἀβαρία), while an anonymous Byzantine geographer has *Avar* for an area different from that of the Avar khaganate.⁶⁰

The name *Scythians* was the standard one for peoples of the North (the northern barbarians) in direct imitation of classical historiographical models embodying the *other* in the ancient Greek world.⁶¹ It was particularly the nomadic peoples that were called *Scythian nations* (σκυθικά ἔθνη). This was the result of a combination of geography (nomads lived in *Scythia*) and awareness of their nomadic way of life, difficult conditions of living, and poverty.⁶² *Scythia* was mentioned first by Homer.⁶³ Early Byzantine authors employed the name both for the Hungarian plain, and for the land north of the Black Sea, sometimes even for the (Roman province of) *Scythia Minor*.⁶⁴

In the early Byzantine historiography, the name *Skythes* is used both for the steppe peoples and for the Goths. Imitating Herodote, Theodoret write of *Scythians-nomads*, while Menander the Guardsman and Theophylact Simocatta use the name for the nomads of *Scythia*. More complex is the case of Priscus, who calls *Scythians* both the Huns and the Goths, and, in a broader sense, either the inhabitants of *Scythia* or the union of peoples being under the rule of Attila. For Procopius and Agathias, *Scythians* were the tribal groups living in the steppes beyond the Sea of Azov.⁶⁵ Another historiographical model is the identification of the northern barbarians with Gog and Magog. The background of the relevant accounts is made of Biblical references to those mythical peoples living north of Caucasus, whose name was a synonym of disaster.⁶⁶ Peoples of the steppe were also the *Hyperboreans* in reference to their northern abodes.⁶⁷

The Avars were “marginalized” for the same reasons as other nomadic peoples: their religious beliefs, language, nomadism, diet, behavior, perceptions, etc. Both *Scythian* and *barbarian* conveyed the idea that the Avars, along with other steppe peoples, were inferior to the Romans. The image of the Avars did

60 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 357: ὁ μὲν εἰς Πανονίαν τῆς Ἀβαρίας ... ibidem, 359: εἰς δὲ τὰ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν καὶ δῶσιν μέχρις Ἀβαρίας...; Honigmann, *Sieben Klimata*, 227: Τὸ δὲ ἕκτον κλίμα ἐστὶν ἔνθα κείται ἡ Ἀβάρ καὶ ὁ Εὐξεινος πόντος, ἔνθα κατοικοῦσιν οἱ Ἀρμένιοι, καὶ τὰ μέρη τῶν Κασπίων πυλῶν; Kollautz 1969, col. 2–4.

61 Pallas-Brown 2000, 315; Borri 2011, 206; Golden 2011a, 67; Nechaeva 2012; Graff 2016, 154–155.

62 Chernienko 2005, 175.

63 Ibidem 175; Batty 2007, 265.

64 Nechaeva 2012, 26.

65 Borri 2011, 206–207; Nechaeva 2012 20–29.

66 Brandes 2012, 490; Nechaeva 2012, 19; Ostrowski 2014, 223–224.

67 *Suda lexicon* IV, Y 248, 651: Ὑπερβόρειοι: ἔθνος ἀρκτικώτερον, καὶ ἐνδότερον τῶν Σκυθῶν. Andrew of Caesarea, *Comments*, 416 B. *Miracles*, I (165), 158. For the topic, see Bridgman 2005.

not change even when they settled in the former Roman Pannonia, as they maintained their principles regarding the way of life and social organization.⁶⁸ The cultural contrast with Byzantium is evident in many cases, such as in the Corippus' poem, which gives the impression that the Avars were not used to large buildings and luxury decoration. The poet even compares them with wild beasts entering the hippodrome.⁶⁹ On the other hand, as Tivadar Vida points out, "although the Byzantines despised the Avars, just as they did all other barbarian peoples, they did acknowledge their military prowess and their ability to create and administer an empire."⁷⁰

Barbarians like the Avars give speeches in the works of the Byzantine authors (Corippus, Menander the Guardsman, and Theophylact Simocatta), who use them to characterize the speakers as *barbarians*. In other words, those are speeches crafted to fit the stereotypes about barbarians of the steppe. Avar envoys, full of vain pride, employ direct speech, a mixture of sarcasm and threats ("now pleading, now threatening," according to Menander), a clear desire to deceive the addressee (usually the emperor). The khagan speaks plainly, without rhetorical ornament, however by means of his direct and inelegant way of speaking, he therefore appears as aggressive and violent.⁷¹ On the other hand, the Avars seem to have impressed the Byzantines with their long hair braids, which caught the attention of the inhabitants of Constantinople, when the Avar envoys showed up in the capital of the empire in 558.⁷² Regardless of the Avars, the long hair was the characteristic feature attributed to peoples living outside the Roman world and braids were particularly associated with steppe nomads.⁷³

Stereotypes about the Avars are a bit more credible when appearing in speeches delivered by emperors or higher officials. During the negotiations with the Avar envoys, who came to Constantinople in 568, Emperor Justin II told them that "it is more painful to be the friends of the Avars – nomads and

68 Pallas-Brown 2000, 315; Stepanov 2004, 617–619.

69 Corippus, *In Laudem Iustini* 3, 67–68 (231–250); Pallas-Brown 2000, 319.

70 Vida 2016, 254.

71 Pallas-Brown 2000, 318–319; Lung 2015, 47.

72 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 232 (Mango-Scott, *Theophanes*, 339): At the same time the strange race of the so-called Avars reached Byzantium and everyone in the city thronged to gaze at them, as they had never seen such a people. They wore their hair very long at the back, tied with ribbons and plaited. The rest of their dress was like that of the other Huns; Agathias, *Histories*, A1, 13; John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 24, 246; Corippus, *In Laudem Iustini* 3 (l. 262), 68; Pohl 1988a, 18; idem 1988b, 248, 262; Curta 2006a, 62; Pallas-Brown 2000, 315–316; Stark 2008, 81–82, n. 372; Nechaeva 2011, 175; eadem 2014, 42; Vida 2016, 255.

73 Pallas-Brown 2000, 316; Stepanov 2004, 616.

foreigners – than their enemies, since their friendship is treacherous.”⁷⁴ Three years earlier, upon his ascension to the throne, the same emperor had called the Avar envoys “dogs,” threatened to cut their hair, and imprisoned the envoys for half a year in Chalcedon, asking them not to reappear before him.⁷⁵ The Byzantine authors emphasize also the greed of the Avars as motivation for their demands.⁷⁶ Linked to the nomadic morals is the fact that the Avar khagan or his envoys considered it shameful to return “empty-handed” to their land after negotiations,⁷⁷ or not to share the war loot of the Byzantines after operations against the Slavs of the Lower Danube region.⁷⁸

Another common place in Byzantine speeches about the Avars is that they were in fact “fugitives,” refugees from the East seeking the protection of Byzantine emperor.⁷⁹ The same concept is attributed to the (Western) Turks. According to the khagan of the Turks, the Avars were his subjects who had fled from him to seek asylum in Europe.⁸⁰ On the other hand, the Avars are also believed to have had their own negative image about the Byzantines, which reflects the general perception of sedentary populations among the nomads.⁸¹ Such a negative image appears in the reply the Avar envoy Kokh gave to general Priscus in the spring of 593, in which he accused the Byzantines of being corrupt and unworthy.⁸² At the same time, the gifts that the Byzantines sent to the rulers of nomadic peoples, including the Avars, were highly appreciated particularly because they were regarded as enhancing the prestige of the khagan,

74 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 6, 140 (Blockley); Turtledove 1977, 111; Curta 2006a, 63.

75 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 24, 247: Vos canes mortui regno Romanorum minitmini?... Pohl 1988a, 49.

76 See Pohl 1988a, 82; Hardt 2007, 108–113; Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 370.

77 See Menander, *History*, fr. 12.5, 134–136; Synkellos, *Homily*, 313: Καὶ οὕτω μὲν ὁ δουτικὸς ἐχθρὸς, ὁ τοῦ σκοτοῦς υἱός, μετ’ αἰσχύνῃς ἀνέστρεψεν ἄπρακτος ... Pohl 1992, 18; Hardt 2007, 111.

78 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 11. 17, 244–245 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 178): Let not the Chagan remain without due share of the booty. He has attacked my land and wrought injury on my subjects. Pohl 1988a, 117. Curta 2001a, 207–208.

79 Corippus, *In Laudem Iustinii* 3, 70 (320–322): quae fortia regna subegit, effera gens Avarum proprias defendere terras non potuit, sedesque suas fugitiva reliquit; ibidem, 193, n. 319. Simocatta, *History*, VII, 7. 5, 256; ibidem, I, 5. 11, 50; Pohl 1988a, 28; Madgearu 2007, 263. Nechaeva 2011, 179.

80 Menander, *History*, fr. 4. 2, 44–46; Pohl 1988a, 29; Nechaeva 2011, 176.

81 Stepanov 2004, 615.

82 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 6. 9, 231 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 168): You have administered baseness to the barbarians: we should not have known about treaty-breaking, if we had not found you as teachers of deceit.

while the annual subsidies (tribute) paid to them by the imperial government constituted an income of vital importance for political and military reasons.⁸³

The sources highlight the khagan of the Avars, for he (or his deputies) was the one with whom the Byzantines negotiated treaties. After their settlement in Central Europe, the bellicose nomads turned into political partners with whom one needed to deal by means of diplomacy. This change, as well as a number of social transformations taking place inside the Avar society, considerably strengthened the position of the khagan, who was now not only the conqueror of new lands and peoples but also the one regulating more complicated social relations.⁸⁴ In the eyes of their sedentary neighbors (and, most certainly, in those of the Byzantine authors), the khagan was a warrior and a bandit, a charismatic ruler, but also the embodiment of a certain tradition and the political link between different peoples. To the nomads, he was the leader who took his people into new lands, and stood at the top of the tribal hierarchy. The military success of the khagan, namely the acquisition and redistribution of booty gained from campaigns and plundering expeditions, reinforced his authority and prestige. Such success meant simultaneously political cohesion and prosperity for his subjects.⁸⁵

The only khagan of the Avars known by name is Baian, and he was apparently the most influential in Avar history. All other rulers are mentioned with the title *khagan* (χαγάνος, *cagan*) that is otherwise known from the history of other steppe nomads.⁸⁶ Names of several envoys are known (Kandikh, Targitius, Kokh, and Apsikh), and members of the Avar elite are even called λογάδες (“the chosen ones” or “aristocrats”).⁸⁷ Sometimes, Avar leaders are simply ἄρχοντες (leaders)⁸⁸ or ἑξάρχος (commander).⁸⁹ Genuinely Avar (or broader nomadic) titles are known for the later period: *Iugurrus*, *Tudun*, *Kapkhan*, *Tarkhan*, as well as a female one: *Catun*.⁹⁰ It is important to note that, unlike other nomadic or Germanic rulers, the khagans of the Avars never received from the Byzantines such titles as *patrician* or *magister militum*. As Tivadar Vida points out

83 Pohl, 1988a, 178–185; Pallas-Brown 2000, 313–314.

84 Pallas-Brown 2000, 314; Chernienko 2005, 173–174, 177.

85 Chernienko 2005, 175–177; Golden 2015, 333, 336.

86 Pohl 1988a, 17; Chernienko 2005, 176; Curta 2006b, 1–31. Certain Avar “khagans” of the early ninth century are also known by name, see ch. 4.1, n. 189.

87 Simocatta, *History*, vi, 11. 6, 242; Synkellos, *Homily* 10, 78; Pohl 1988a, 186–188; idem 1988b, 271; Curta 2006a, 64. For the title, see also Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 147–149; Tausend 2004, 819–828.

88 Menander, *History*, fr. 15. 1, 148; Pohl 1988a, 186; Chernienko 2005, 176; Curta 2006a, 64.

89 *Chronicon Paschale*, 724; Pohl 1988a, 188.

90 Pohl 1988a, 293–306; idem 2003, 594; Golden 1992, 110. The title *Tudun* (Τουδούνος) occurs too in the Byzantine sources. See ch. 5.3.3, n. 89.

“the ideologically and administratively closed Khaganate was unable to align its long-term goals with those of Empire, and neither were there any particular Byzantine expectations to do so.” It is therefore difficult to accept Dietrich Claude’s suggestion, according to which the first treaty between Byzantium and the Avars in 558 created a technical relationship (adoption) between Justinian and the khagan Baian. To be sure, references to such a relationship are placed in speeches delivered by Avars. However, because of the nature of those speeches and their role in the narrative strategies of the Byzantine authors, such references cannot be taken at face value, namely as evidence that Baian had ever been adopted by Justinian.⁹¹

3 The Avars Come to Europe

The migration of the Avars to Europe is believed by most scholars to have been caused by the political turmoil generated in the mid-sixth century by the rise of the Turks in Central Asia. In fact, however, the Avars are first mentioned by Priscus in the fifth century (likely c. 463), on the occasion of the delegation of three nomadic peoples (Saragurs, Urogs and Onogurs) to Constantinople. According to Priscus, the Sabirs, pushed by Avars, drove out of their country – probably the Khazakh steppes – the Saragurs, the Urogs, and the Onogurs. The Avars were pushed out of their own homeland by other, unnamed people who had been attacked by ocean mist and griffins living on the shore of the Ocean.⁹² Also, “in the same way the Saraguri were driven out and came into contact with the Akatirian Huns”.⁹³

The reference to griffins and the Ocean betray the Herodotean origin of Priscus’ story. The Ἀβάρης (Abaris) of Herodote was one of the *Hyperboreans*, who were neighbors of the man-eating griffins and lived by the northern ocean.⁹⁴ The myth of Abaris appears in various narrations in the ancient Greek

91 Menander *History*, fr. 12.6, 138: I am here, Emperor, on a mission from your son. For you are truly the father of Baian, our master; Synkellos, *Homily*, 11, 302: the khagan called Heraclius father and benefactor; Pohl 1988a, 214–215; Claude 1989, 25–28, 31; Vachkova 2008, 344; Vida 2016, 257.

92 Priscus, *Fragments*, 40. 1–2, 344; *Suda lexicon* I, A 18, 4; Haussig 1956, 21–22; idem 1975, 97; Czeglédý 1983, 36–37, 97–100, who considers as place of the conflicts the area of Altai mountains and eastern Kazakhstan. Pohl 1988a, 24, 38; Ziemann 2007, 67; Golden 1992, 88, 92, 95; idem 2011b, 136–137; idem 2011c, 237; idem 2013, 49–50; idem 2015, 343–344.

93 Priscus, *Fragments*, 40. 2, 344; Golden 2015, 346.

94 Herodote, *History*, IV, 13, 512; ibidem, IV, 36, 528; *Suda lexicon* I, A 18, 4; Uray-Kőhalmi 1972, 145–147; Haussig 1973, 184–187; Czeglédý 1983, 98, 102; Pohl 1988a, 29; idem 1990, 117; Golden 2013, 50; idem 2015, 344.

literature. This mythical person was a servant or priest of Apollo. He had obtained mantic power from him, and rode all around the world on this arrow without eating anything. He went around Greece prophesying, making sacrifices to Apollo and gathering golden offerings to place in Apollo's temple in the land of the Hyperboreans, upon his return there.⁹⁵

While there can be little doubt about the authenticity of the information regarding Sabirs, Saragurs, Urogs and Onogurs,⁹⁶ one would have to take Priscus' account at face value to admit that he described the mid-fifth century conflicts and expansion of the Avars in Central Asia. Under that assumption, the Avar invasion into southern Kazakhstan caused the migration both of the Sabirs and of the three Oğur tribes (the western branch of Ting-ling or T'ieh-lê tribes). The Sabirs replaced the latter in western Siberia and northern Kazakhstan and the Oğur tribes moved from those areas to the western Ponto-Caspian steppes.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the migration of the Sabirs to the fringes of the northern Caucasus is dated to the early sixth century, c. 506–515.⁹⁸ Against this generally accepted interpretation, one could argue that Priscus' account could concern the events of 350 in Central Asia and not the westward migration of the Ogurs from the Kazakh steppe after 460, as that event is not mentioned in any other sources and is in fact derived from the tenth-century *Suda lexicon*.⁹⁹

The information of Priscus on the westward migration of nomadic tribes under the pressure of the Avars matches the evidence regarding the history of Central Asia as the Avars (referred also as Uar-Huns, Juan-Juan, Jou-Jan, Ruan-Ruan or Rouran)¹⁰⁰ imposed their authority over the area for almost a century,

95 Bridgman 2005, 16, 32, 45, 49–50, 69, 88, 92–93, 100, 119, 125.

96 The names of these tribes appear in various forms and their identifications have long been discussed (e.g. Sabirs/Σάβ(ε)ῖροι: Saviri, Savirk'/Sawirk, Nushibi; Onogurs/Ονόγουροι: Onogundurs, Ongur, Enqu, Obxontor Blkar; Urogs/Οὔρωγοι: Ugors/Oğurs/'Ογούροι; Saragurs/Σαράγουροι: Šara Oğurs). See Obrisánszky 2009, 24–36; Golden 2011c, 237–238; idem 2015, 345–348. On the identification of the Oğur/Oğuric/Oğuz tribes with the T'ieh-lê (or Ting-ling) tribal union, divided into eastern (northern Mongolia and Lake Baikal), southern (at the Great Wall) and western (Ponto-Caspian steppes) branches, see Obrisánszky, op. cit., 27–29; Golden 2011b, 137–138; idem 2015, 345.

97 Czeglédy 1983, 36–37, 99–103, 111–113, where an approach on the topic of the T'ieh-lê tribal union. Bálint 1989, 147; Golden 1992, 93, 95, 104; idem 2011b, 138–140; idem 2015, 344–346, 349, who claims that Priscus' account reflects the outcome of the conflicts of the 430s–458 between the Avars and the Tabgāč (Northern Wei dynasty) in Central Asia, recorded in the *Weishu*.

98 Czeglédy 1983, 37, 103; Golden 1992, 105; idem 2015, 349.

99 *Suda lexicon* 1, A 18, 4: Ἀβάρις; Obrisánszky 2009, 27–29.

100 For the identification of the names *Uar* and *Chounni* with the *Hephthalites* after 467 as well as with the *Juan-Juan* of the Chinese sources argues Károly Czeglédy (1983, 33–34, 75–76, 92–97). Golden 2013, 62–66. In his point of view, "*Rouran* was not an ethnonym but

approximately from 463 to 555. The Avars are considered to derive their origin from the Eastern Hu, referred as *Donghu/Tunghu* in the Chinese sources. The latter provide testimonies on the Avars as they came often in conflict with the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534).¹⁰¹

The beginning of the Avar expansion in Central Asia is dated back to 350 AD. According to the meager testimony of a Chinese source, known as *Tongdian* (based in part on a now lost part of the *Weishu*), the Avars, coming from the Altai Mountains, drove out the Huns from the southern Kazakh steppe and the adjacent territories. After their defeat, a part of the Huns moved to Europe. Further, the Avars invaded Sogdia and Tokharistan (northeastern Afghanistan), where they expelled the Kidarites Huns, and then moved towards the Turkmen steppe and Iran, reaching the shores of the Caspian Sea. At about the same time, the Oğur tribes moved from the Irtysh region to northern Kazakhstan, and occupied the formerly Hunnic territory in the southern Kazakh steppe.¹⁰²

Since the early fifth century, the Avars, under the khagan Shih-lun (402–410) were masters of the Inner Asian steppes, expanded their control up to Lake Baikal and Eastern Turkestan, and defeated the nomadic T'ieh-le (or Kao-chü) coalition in northern and western Mongolia. The Avars became a dangerous neighbor for the Chinese, but in 429 the T'o-pa Wei (Tuoba/Northern Wei dynasty) of northern China managed to defeat them. In c. 434, the Avars attacked the Kidarite Huns in Bactria and in c. 450, they were waging wars in the region of the T'ien-shan city-states, reaching as far as Turfan and Ürümqi.¹⁰³

After the migrations of the early 460s, the Avars ruled over Central Asia (Mongolia, Southern Manchuria, the Tarim Basin, parts of Southern Siberia and much of Xinjiang) until the mid-sixth century. During that period, they fought against their T'ieh-le subjects and came in conflicts with T'opa.¹⁰⁴ The balance of power gradually changed when the Turk chieftain Bumin (T'u-man), who was a subject of the Avars, allied himself in 545 with the Western Wei. Being engulfed in internal struggles and defeated by the Turks in 552 and

a sobriquet (of still uncertain meaning) that the ruling house took and which was picked up and used as an ethnonym, ultimately in a pejorative form (Ruan ruan) by the Tabġaċ. The actual name/self-designation of this people or tribal union was *Abar*" ... Luttwak 2009, 58, 97–98.

101 Golden 2013, 45–46, 49. On the language of the Avars, see Vovin 2011, 27–36.

102 On the source, see De la Vaissière 2005, 97–98; idem 2007, 119–132; Wilkinson 2012. See also Czeglédý 1983, 33–36, 67–68, 72–73, 99–101; Golden 1992, 93; idem 2015, 340, 349; Obrusánszky 2009, 28–29, according to whom Hindi and Persian sources recorded that around 350 the Huns spread their control over Bactria and Tokharistan.

103 Taskin, *Materialy*, 268–276; Czeglédý 1983, 68, 102; Bálint 1989, 147; Golden 1992, 77–78; idem 2013, 46; Graff 2016, 145.

104 Taskin, *Materialy*, 276–288; Golden 1992, 78–79; idem 2013, 51, 54; Graff 2016, 145.

555, the Avars fled to Europe, and the Turks replaced them as rulers of Central Asia, where they founded an Eastern (552–630) and a Western (552–659) khaganate.¹⁰⁵ After 546, the Turks subjugated the coalition of T'ie-le. After his victory over the Avars, the khagan Mu-han defeated the Hephthalites (I-ta) and placed under his rule “all the northern barbarians,” before attacking both the western and the eastern Wei.¹⁰⁶ The Avars are mentioned to the *Ecclesiastical History* of Zacharias Rhetor (compiled c. 569) as one of the peoples who lived in the wider area of the Black Sea in c. 555, after the afore-said realignments in Central Asia, however they likely arrived there somewhat later.¹⁰⁷

The Avars appear in the steppe lands north of the Caucasus Mountains in 557, after being first defeated by the Turks.¹⁰⁸ Most historians have taken Theophylact Simocatta's account of early Avar history to refer not only to the split of the Avars (“real” and “Pseudo-Avars”), but also to the western migration of a number of other peoples, who were now regarded as “Avars”. According to Simocatta, in the letter he sent to Emperor Maurice probably in 598, the khagan of the Western Turks bragged about being “lord of the seven climates,” and called “Pseudo-Avars” the Avars who had migrated to Europe. The Byzantine historian picks on that to explain that the Avars were in fact two different tribes, the *Uar* and *Chunni* who had given themselves the name “Avars.” He also states that the Barsilt, the Onogurs, the Sabirs and other Hunnic tribes, seeing that a part of the *Uar* and the *Chunni* had taken refuge in their lands, were afraid that the invaders were the real Avars. For that reason, they gave the refugees magnificent gifts, believing that by such means they would maintain their

105 The victories of the Turk khagans T'umen (Bu-min) and Mu-han over the Avars in 552 and 553 respectively are recorded in many Chinese sources. See Liu Mau-tsai, *Chinesischen Nachrichten* 1, 7–8 (Tschou-schu), 17 (Pei-Ts'i-schu), 21 (Biography of Schi Ning), 35 (Pei-schi), 41 (Sui-schu). See also, Golden 1992, 79; idem 2011a, 72; idem 2013, 64, 351; Luttwak 2009, 97–98; Obrusánszky 2009, 27–28.

106 Liu Mau-tsai, *Chinesischen Nachrichten*, 1, 7 (Tschou-schu), 41 (Sui-schu); Czeglédý 1983, 109; Golden 1992, 103.

107 Zacharias Rhetor, *Ecclesiastical History*, 12. 7, 449–451: Unaghur populus qui in tabernaculis habitant, Oghor, Sabhir, Bugar, Kortrighar, Abhar, KSR, DYRM, Sarargur, B'GRSYQ, KWLS, Abhdel, Ephthalita, hi populi tredecim in tabernaculis habitantes, et carne pecorum et piscibus vivunt et feris et armis; Czeglédý 1971, 133–148; Pohl 1988a, 22; Ziemann 2007, 68–69; Golden 1992, 97; idem 2011b, 138; idem 2011c, 237–238; idem 2013, 59; idem 2015, 350.

108 Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, E 1, 552 (Whitby, *Evagrius*, 255): The Avars are a Scythian race, one of the wagon-dwellers who range across the plains over there beyond the Caucasus; they had fled en masse from their neighbours the Turks, after being ill-treated by them, and had come to Bosphorus; Golden 2013, 63, who supposes that some Hephthalite (Uar-Hun) elements had joined the Avars. The coming of the Avars to the Alans is dated by R.C. Blockley (Menander, 253, n. 19) back to 559/60.

freedom. That, however, encouraged the *Uar* and *Chunni* to take the name of Avars seriously, seeing that it caused terror to other peoples.¹⁰⁹ As for the “real” Avars, Simocatta mentions only that they fled to a country named *Moukri*, near *Tavgast* (Tabghach), two areas that historians have identified with North Korea and northern China (Manchuria) respectively.¹¹⁰

Simocatta’s account has caused much debate about whether the Avars who migrated to Europe could be identified with the Juan-Juan. Most scholars assume that those coming to Europe were a part of the “real” Avars, and that the names *Abar/Avars* and *Ouarchonites* (*Ouar* and *Chunni*) refer to one and the same people, who, furthermore, may be identified with the Juan-Juan (or Hua) of the Chinese sources.¹¹¹ By contrast, others accept Simocatta’s theory and believe that the “real” Avars, whether identical with Juan-Juan or not, have in fact fled to the east, and not to the west.

The main opponent of such an identification was the German Byzantinist Hans Wilhelm Haussig. He proposed instead that the Avars were associated to *Apar*, *Abar*, *Ben* (*Hun* or *Hion*) and *Bou-Huan*, all of which are peoples known either from old Turkic inscriptions in the Orchon valley in Mongolia, or from Chinese sources. Those are names of peoples who migrated from Manchuria to western Turkestan and Sogdia, and then to Europe. Haussig believed that the Juan-Juan, who lived in southern Mongolia, had been conquered at some point between 552 and 555 by the Turk khagans T’u-men, K’o-lo and Mu-han. Meanwhile, the “European” Avars were defeated in western Turkestan by the Turk khagan Sizabul (Istami). Haussig regarded Theophylact Simocatta’s account of the Avar flight as confirming the testimony of the Chinese sources about the defeat of Juan-Juan, and noted that those sources make no reference to Juan-Juan fleeing to the west. Furthermore, Haussig identified the *Uar*

109 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 7.7–8.5, 257–259 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 188–190): For it is by a misnomer that the barbarians on the Ister have assumed the appellation of Avars ... In point of fact even up to our present times the Pseudo-Avars (for it is more correct to refer to them thus) are divided in their ancestry, some bearing the time-honoured name of Var while others are called Chunni; Haussig 1973, 179–184; idem 1975, 96–97; Avenarius 1974, 41–43; Czeglédý 1983, 107–108; Pohl 1988a, 29–31; idem 1988b, 261–262; idem 2003, 575–577; Curta 2006a, 61–62; Ziemann 2007, 69, 103; Zuckermann 2007, 421; Golden 2013, 63–65. For the discussion on the date of the embassy, see De la Vaissière 2010, 219–224.

110 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 7.12, 257–258; Haussig 1956, 22; idem 1973, 182, 191; Czeglédý 1983, 38, 105–108. Pohl 1988a, 30; Golden 2013, 49, 64.

111 Mohay 1976, 131–133; Czeglédý 1983, 34, 73, 77, 88, 102–106, 120, 124; Bóna 1988, 443; Pohl 1988a, 31–37, 221–222; idem 1990, 115–117; Bálint 1989, 147; Golden 2013, 60; Graff 2016, 137–139.

and *Chounni* with the *Hephthalites*.¹¹² Nonetheless, the *Uarchonites* are clearly identified with the Avars in the work of Menander the Guardsman.¹¹³ A name similar to *Bou-Huan* is *Wusun*, which is identified by Victor Henry Mair and Fangyi Cheng with the early Turks and the mythical tribe *Ashina*.¹¹⁴

The identification of the “European” Avars with the Juan-Juan appears particularly complicated because of the confusion in Chinese sources regarding the names of Central Asian peoples,¹¹⁵ as well as the obviously mythical elements in the Byzantine sources. Furthermore, an important argument is that “the steppe society tribes used at least two names for themselves. First of all they had an own tribe name, as *Ogur*, and if they belonged to a big alliance, they used that, too.”¹¹⁶ Simocatta’s account of the “Pseudo-Avars” is likely a *topos*, which both Károly Czeglédy and Walter Pohl associated with an equivalent description in Tacitus’ *Germania*. Simocatta mentions that first, the neighbors of the *Uar* and *Hunni* regarded them as the real Avars, and then, those two tribes (the “European” Avars) adopted this name in order to instill fear into other peoples. Tacitus similarly argues that “the name *Germania* has later origins and spread relatively recently. The people, who initially crossed the Rhine and expelled the Gauls, now *Tungri*, were called at this time Germans: it was the name of a single tribe and not of an entire people, which was imposed gradually in such a way that all the Germans, because of the fear which evoked the name of the victors, espoused the same name”.¹¹⁷ This parallel suggests that

112 Haussig 1953, 275–436; idem 1956, 21–43; idem 1973, 173–192; idem 1975, 95–103; Samolin 1957–1958, 62. On the ethnonym *Abar/Avar* and *Apar*, see also Czeglédy 1983, 102; Golden 1992, 76–77; idem 2011a, 72 (*Abar/Avar* may have been the self-designation of the Avars); idem 2013, 58–59, 61–62; idem 2015, 341 (it is far from clear that the later Asian Avars are to be sought in the *Wuhuan*).

113 Menander, *History*, fr. 19. 1, 174 (Blockley): And your Emperor shall pay me due penalty, for he has spoken words of friendship to me while making a treaty with the *Uarkhonitai*, our slaves (he meant the Avars) who had fled their masters; Czeglédy 1983, 106.

114 Czeglédy 1983, 47–48; Mair and Cheng 2016, 235–244.

115 Czeglédy 1983, 85–97, 102; Golden 2013, 45.... “there are many examples of peoples who have self-designations that are quite different from the names used for them by their neighbors ... The people termed *Rouran* in Chinese sources and variants of this are not known by this name outside of the Chinese accounts”.

116 Obrusánszky 2009, 28.

117 Tacitus, *Germania*, 2, 26: *Ceterum Germaniae vocabulum recens et nuper additum, quoniam, qui primi Rhenum transgressi Gallos expulerint ac nunc Tungri, tunc Germani vocati sunt: Ita nationis nomen, non gentis evaluisse paulatim, ut omnes primum a victore ob metum, mox etiam a se ipsis invento nomine Germani vocarentur*; Czeglédy 1983, 117–118, 124; Pohl. 1988a, 32; idem, 1990, 116–117; idem 2003, 577; see also Bálint 1989, 147; Golden 2013, 65.

Simocatta's account is based on a trope, and therefore not much trust may be placed on it.

From the above, it is not too far-fetched to believe that the Avars (or part of them) came to Europe after the conquest of Central Asia by the Turks. The whole may be not a moot point, if one accepts that, leaving aside those who remained under the rule of the Turks, the Avars fled both to the east and to west.¹¹⁸ At this assumption, we may provide two arguments. First, such a split is mentioned in a Chinese source, the *Pei-Ts'i-schu*. Describing the Avar-Turkic conflicts, the text records that after the victory of the Turks in 552, a part of the Avars fled to the northern Ts'i, while those Avars (Ju-ju) who remained in their lands elected a new ruler (T'ie-fa). The next year, after a new attack of the Turks, the latter "escaped to the south".¹¹⁹ Second, we have to take into account the claims of the Turks to the Byzantines about the "fugitives Avars," which suggest their split after the defeat at the hands of the Turks.¹²⁰

Regarding these arguments, we may consider a passage of the *Pei-schi*, for the year 555: "the leader of Juan-juan escaped with more than one thousand families to Kuan-tschung (to the western Wei). As the Turks (T'u-küe) were feeling powerful and maintained friendly relations with the western Wei, they sent many delegations to them asking, for their satisfaction, that all the fugitives of Juan-juan should be killed ... The later emperor Wen-ti (T'ai-tsu of the northern Tschou) granted them this favour, arrested the leader of Juan-juan and his subjects, more than three thousand people, and delivered them to the envoys of the Turks. All of them were beheaded at the gate Ts'ing-men. Only the boys under 18 years old avoided the slaughter and were given as slaves to the homes of the local authorities of the western Wei."¹²¹ Also, according to the *Biography of Schi Ning*, after the victory of the Turks over the Avars, "those who escaped, were concentrated around the descendants of the [khagan] A-na-kuei and attacked the area west of the Yellow River. [The general] Schi Ning led troops, attacked them and captured two descendants of A-na-kuei and the leaders of their tribes. Thereafter Schi Ning defeated them in every battle and killed in toto some ten thousand men".¹²²

118 Bálint 1989, 147, according to whom the Avars were divided into three parts: one got away to Europe, the second to southern Mongolia and the third to China.

119 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Chinesischen Nachrichten* 1, 17.

120 See above, n. 79.

121 Liu Mau-Tsai, *Chinesischen Nachrichten* 1, 36.

122 Ibidem, 21.

Byzantium and the Avars from 558 to 582

1.1 Emperor Justinian I and the Avars

Relations between Byzantium and the Avars officially started in January 558, when the Avars, at that time stationed in the steppe lands north of the Caucasus Mountains, dispatched their first embassy to Justinian. According to Menander the Guardsman, the mediator was the ruler of the Alans, Sarosius, an ally of the Byzantines.¹ The head envoy of the Avars, a man named Kandikh, presented to Justinian the requests of “the greatest and most powerful of tribes, the invincible Avars”: land for settlement, annual tribute, and presents. He also promised that the Avars would fight the enemies of the empire. Justinian accepted the idea of a formal alliance and, as a confirmation, sent imperial gifts to the Avar khagan in the form of cords “worked with gold, couches, and silken garments.” However, he rejected the Avars’ demand to settle within the limits of the empire.²

As a sign of good will, he nonetheless dispatched a *spatharius* named Valentinus to the Avars in order to turn them against the peoples who lived north of the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea.³ To Menander, Justinian’s handling of the Avar problem could only be justified by his old age, as the emperor had lost his disposition to wage wars, and was now trying to ward off enemies by some other means.⁴ However, the main goal of the emperor, had he been younger, was likely not to “utterly destroy the Avars,” as Menander notes, but

1 Arzhantseva 2007, 61, who locates the territory of Sarosius in the Upper Kuban, the Pyatigor’e region and present-day Balkaria, i.e. the Kislovodsk Basin. Luttwak 2009, 103–104.

2 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 1–2, 48–51 (Blockley): The Emperor put the matter up for discussion, and when the holy senate had praised his plan and its shrewdness, he immediately sent the presents: cords worked with gold, couches, silk garments and a great many other objects which would mollify the arrogant spirits of the Avars; Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, E 1, 552; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 232; Victoris Episcopi Tonnensis, *Chronica*, 205, 563. 2: Eo anno Iustinianus princeps legatos gentis Avarorum primus primos suscepit et cum donis maximis remeare unde venerant facit. Victor dates incorrectly to 563 the first Avar delegation to Constantinople; Avenarius 1974, 44; Kollautz 1980, 448; Pohl 1988a, 18, 46, 180; idem 2003, 573; Ziemann 2007, 103–104; Luttwak 2009, 59; Golden 2011a, 72; Sarantis 2016, 53 (in 557).

3 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 2, 50 (ibidem, 253, n. 22); Pohl 1988a, 19; Ziemann 2007, 104; Graff 2016, 136.

4 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 1, 48; Pohl 1988a, 19–20; Luttwak 2009, 59; Syrbe 2012, 292.

to use them in the interest of the Byzantines.⁵ In reality, the emperor's decision was based on sound political judgment and followed the traditions of the Byzantine policies towards the steppe nomads, having in mind the protection of the northern borders of the empire. This, after all, was why the Avars had to be quickly integrated into the service of Constantinople.

The relations of the Empire with its northern neighbors were of great political significance during the sixth century. The war with Persia and the high demands of the eastern front implied a great deal of caution in dealing with them. Peace was to be maintained as much as possible by diplomatic means, even when the Balkan provinces suffered from attacks from both Slavs and nomads. At the heart of the Byzantine foreign policy in order to protect its northern border were three inter-dependent regions: the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Danube. In all three, Byzantium exercised both a political and an economic influence. The cornerstone of that defence system was the region north of the Caucasus Mountains, in the steppe lands between the Lower Volga and the Sea of Azov. With Crimea as a basis of diplomatic activities, Byzantium sought the control of the "steppe corridor" through which nomadic invaders from Central Asia could easily reach the northern shore of the Black Sea, the Lower Danube and, through the passes across the Caucasus Mountains, Asia Minor.

In order to maintain the balance of power along its northern border, but also to achieve its political, military and economic goals in the region, Byzantium had to seek allies on the Lower Volga and in the steppe lands north of the Caucasus Mountains. Those allies were to play the role of a buffer against raids of nomads. For that purpose, the Byzantine diplomacy did not hesitate to use incentives, such as Christianization, trade relations, as well as other means (e.g., inciting one people against another or preventing the formation of alliances against the Empire).⁶ Such features of the Byzantine diplomacy in the lands north of the Black and Caspian seas become salient during the reign of Justinian. The emperor created a system of alliances, with the Kutrigurs living west of Sea of Azov and the river Don, the Utigurs (Onogurs?) in the area of the Sea of Azov, as well as the Antes, who lived mostly between the Dnieper and the Dniester, north of the settlement area of the afore-mentioned peoples.⁷

5 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 1, 48; Luttwak 2009, 59–60.

6 Kyriakes 1993, 45–46; Papasoteriou 2000, 65–66, 105–108; Luttwak 2009, 293; Golden 2015, 339, 352 (like China, Constantinople was fighting "barbarians with barbarians"); idem 2001a, 116; Lung 2015, 38. See also, Chrysos 1992, 25–39; Noonan 1992, 117–123.

7 On the location of that peoples see Procopius, *De Bellis*, VIII, 4, 9, 501–502 and 5. 23, 507. Jordanes, *Getica*, v 35, 63: Antes vero, qui sunt eorum fortissimi, qua Ponticum mare curvatur, a Danastro extenduntur usque ad Danaprum, quae flumina multis mansionibus ab invicem

The influence of Byzantium became significantly stronger with the spread of Christianization to the Caucasus region (Abasgi, Tzani, Zihs, Lazi, the Sabirs, as well as the Crimean Huns).⁸

The ability of the Avars to wage war was highly appreciated by the Byzantines (as Theophylact Simocatta notes)⁹ even though initially, at least, the Avars do not seem to have been very numerous. If one is to believe the claims of the envoys of the Turks who came in 568 to Constantinople, the Avars who had fled from the dominion of Sizabul (552–576) and had migrated westward were no more than 20,000 people.¹⁰ After their alliance with Justinian, the Avars succeeded in a short time to subdue several peoples and to create for a while a new balance of power in the lands north of the Caucasus. According to Menander, the Avars managed to subdue the Onogurs, the Zaloi (of Hunnic origin), the Sabirs, and the Antes.¹¹ It is not clear where the starting-point of their campaign was located, but it must have been to the east from the river Dnieper.¹² During the Avar expedition, there is no mention of the Kutrigurs, who, up to that moment, were the most dangerous enemy of Byzantium among the steppe peoples. In 558/59 the Kutrigurs led by Zabergan, and followed by Slavs, raided the Balkans as far as Constantinople and withdrew only upon promise that they be paid an annual tribute.¹³ Some believe that the Kutrigurs were subjugated at the same time as all the other peoples mentioned above, namely between 558 and 561/62,¹⁴ while others regard them as maintaining some degree of autonomy at least until 568, when the Kutrigurs were ordered by Baian to overrun Dalmatia.¹⁵

absunt; Mazal 2001, 182–193, 244–251; Luttwak 2009, 59–60; Golden 2011b, 139–140. On the identification of the Ogurs with the Onogurs, who lived from the North Caucasian (Kuban river zone) steppelands to the Lower Don, see Golden, *op. cit.*, 142.

8 Fowden 1993, 101–109; Mazal 2001, 244–251; Kralides 2003, 190–193; Lee 2013, 278–279; Bol-lók 2017, 423–424.

9 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 8.4, 259.... (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 190): for among the Scythian nations that of the Avars is said to be the most adept tribe; Nechaeva 2012, 24, n. 82.

10 Menander, *History*, fr. 10. 1, 114–116; Fritze 1982, 61; Pohl 1988a, 37; Golden 2011a, 107; Nechaeva 2012, 176; Graff 2016, 136.

11 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 2–3, 50 (*ibidem*, 253, 276, n. 23–24, 225); Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, E 1, 552; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 157–158; Avenarius 1974, 44–51; Fritze 1982, 61–62; Czeglédy 1983, 105; Pohl 1988a, 18–19, 39–40; Ziemann 2007, 104; Luttwak 2009, 60; Golden 2015, 351; Nikolov 2017, 66–67.

12 *Suda lexicon* II, I 355, 634; Blockley, *Menander*, 276, n. 224; Pohl 1988a, 32, 39.

13 See Mazal 2001, 192–193; Ziemann 2007, 99–100; Luttwak 2009, 93; Born 2012, 95; Syrbe 2012, 297–298. Golden 2015, 352; Curta 2016, 77.

14 Zástěrová 1971, 34; Avenarius 1974, 49–51; Waldmüller 1976, 85; Bóna 1981, 103; Mazal 2001, 193.

15 Pohl 1988a, 39, 62, who assumes that the Avars helped Zabergan against the Utigurs in 559 and, in exchange for this, the Kutrigurs offered their military power to Baian. Ziemann 2007, 102.

The Avar sojourn in the lands north of the Caucasus Mountains was short. Despite the fact that a huge area was already under their rule, they moved in 562 to the Lower Danube and they settled to the northeast of that river. Their move may have been caused by the threat of the Western Turks.¹⁶ An Avar attack, mentioned by Theophanes as a raid of the “Huns” into Thrace, took place in that same year.¹⁷ Archaeologists have associated with that raid the destruction observed in Sacidava (Musait, in present-day Dobroudja), as well as the burial of the hoard found in the nearby site of Topalu, the latest coin of which is dated by Vujadin Ivanišević in 568/69 and associated either with the Avar attack of 570 (see below) or an unknown Slavic raid in 571.¹⁸

After their raid, the Avars sent envoys demanding settlement within the Empire, namely the status of federates (*foederati*). The envoys initially negotiated with the general Justin, who offered a part of Pannonia II, the land in which in 512 Emperor Anastasius I had settled the Heruls as federates.¹⁹ That area included the land between the Sava, the Danube and hills now known as Fruška Gora. The Avars refused Justin's offer, as they wanted to settle in Scythia Minor. That position would have offered several advantages, for it was much closer to Constantinople and also much more suitable for the breeding of the Avar horses, a prerequisite for the establishment of a Khaganate in the region. During those fruitless negotiations, the Avar envoy Kunimon told Justin that Baian's ultimate target was to cross the Danube and to fight against Byzantium. Justin, having informed the emperor what the intentions of the Avars were, sent the embassy to Constantinople and ordered the general Bonus to take measures for the defense of the Danube.²⁰

In Ecateriina Lung's view, the story of Kunimon illustrates “a common practice of the period, that of recruiting double agents from inside the group of envoys and using them as spies.”²¹ Considering the outcome of the negotiations, Alexandru Madgearu notes the main strategic plan of Justinian, namely

16 Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 147; Czeglédy 1983, 39, 105, where a hypothesis about the possible Avar remnants in the north Caucasus area; Pohl 1988a, 40, 43; Sarantis 2016, 53.

17 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 236–237 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 347): In the same year Obaisipolis? was captured by the Huns ... In April Anastasioupolis in Thrace was also captured by the same Huns; Pohl 1988a, 62; Madgearu 1996, 36 (Bulgar attack); Liebeschuetz 2015, 437.

18 Ivanišević 2006, 79; see also *ibidem*, 179–180 (Catalogue des trésors, no. 80).

19 Sarantis 2010, 369–371.

20 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 4, 50–52 (*ibidem*, 253–254, n. 26–29); Kollautz 1980, 448–449; Pohl 1988a, 44–45; Mazal 2001, 193–194; Madgearu 2007, 263 (in 563); Gradanin 2009, 8; Lung 2015, 43; Sarantis 2013d, 770, 774; Liebeschuetz 2015, 441. On the Scythia Minor's landscape, see Sophoulis 2012, 57.

21 Lung 2015, 43.

“to keep the Avars as allies in the north-Danubian area in order to prevent the inroads from the steppes.” On the other hand, his argument that “Justinian had no reason to accept their installation in the Empire”²² is clearly contradicted by the emperor’s offer of settlement in Pannonia II. Furthermore, the intention of the Avars to attack from inside the Byzantine Empire became known to Justinian after the first phase of the negotiations, and not before the offer of Pannonia II. What we may conclude is that for Byzantium, maintaining the Lower Danube frontier was a way to ensure against attacks the Balkan provinces and Constantinople. As clearly indicated by the negotiations of 562, the Avars also regarded the Lower Danube as a possible area of settlement under the pretext of defending the Balkan provinces from attacks by other peoples. However, they in fact sought to bring under control the area of the Byzantine frontier and the Slavic tribes living in that area, as well as to use the pressure on that frontier in order to secure annual tribute from Byzantium.

Understanding what the long-term goals of the Avars were if allowed to settle in Scythia Minor, Justinian rejected the Avar claims. Following the negotiations, the Avar envoys extended their stay in Constantinople in order to buy weapons and clothes. However, Justinian ordered Justin to confiscate the weapons that the envoys had bought, a decision that caused the displeasure of the Avars.²³ Unlike Menander the Guardsman, the much later *Chronicle of Monemvasia* incorrectly states that Justinian allowed the Avars to settle in Moesia II, in the region of Silistra (Dorostolon).²⁴

Justinian’s rejection of the Avar request for settlement on imperial soil temporarily removed the Avar threat from the Lower Danube. The Avars turned their interest to the West and in that same year (562), during a raid into Thuringia, they clashed for the first time with the Franks. The king of Austrasia, Sigibert I (561–575) moved against the Avars and forced them to withdraw.²⁵ The Avar attack on the West has been associated with Justinian’s foreign policy in Italy, specifically with his concern with Sigibert I, who had threatened the Byzantine possessions in the peninsula.²⁶ After their defeat in Thuringia, the

22 Madgearu 2007, 263.

23 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 4, 52; Bachrach 1984, 20; Pohl 1988a, 45, 195; Golden 2011a, 115; Lung 2015, 45.

24 *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 4–6; Pohl 1988a, 45; Curta 2001a, 90; Madgearu 2007, 263.

25 Gregory of Tours, *Books of Histories*, IV. 23, 155; Nam post mortem Chlothari regis Chuni Gallias appetunt, contra quos Sigyberthus exercitum dirigit, et gestum contra eos bellum, vicit atque fugavit. Sed postea rex eorum amicitias cum eodem per legatus meruit; Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, II. 10, 78–79 (562); Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 165, 228; Avenarius 1974, 57–58; Fritze 1982, 77–78; Pohl 1988a, 45–46; Schimpff 2007, 400–401.

26 Fritze 1982, 80–81; idem 1994, 73–74.

Avars returned to the Lower Danube. Their activity in the next three years is unknown, as sources do not provide any information about them until the ascension of Justin II to the throne (November 14, 565).²⁷

1.2 Justin II's Policy and the Establishment of the Avar Khaganate

One week after the ascension of Justin II, a new Avar delegation arrived in Constantinople headed by a man named Targitius. The Avar envoy told the emperor that his ruler, Baian, had already defeated the enemies of Byzantium, a task for which he asked for an increase of the annual gifts that Emperor Justinian had offered to the Avars in 558. Justin rejected the demand, because, he said, Justinian's gifts had been voluntary and he was not going to give them anything, since he had no need of Avar services. The outcome of the diplomatic encounter between Targitius and Emperor Justin II was that the alliance was broken and the gifts interrupted. Justin's attitude towards Targitius suggests a great departure from the previous policy of Justinian. Justin told the Avar envoys that fearing the empire was the best warranty for their lives, and did not hesitate to threaten them with war, if their claims exceeded what he was willing to offer them.²⁸

The emperor's stiff attitude may have been a reaction to the changing realities in the lands north of the Black Sea and the Caucasus in the aftermath of the victories that the Avars had obtained on the local nomads and on the Antes between 558 and 562. The imperial government had hopes about the Avars becoming a powerful ally in order to protect the Byzantine interests in the East European steppes. But their move in 562 out of the northern region of the Black Sea put an end, for all practical purposes, to the system of alliances that Emperor Justinian had built. When telling the Avars that "he did not need them," Emperor Justin II thus knew that he, in fact, could no longer count on the Avars for the defense of the northern borders of the Empire.

Justin II's negative attitude towards the Avars was also due to the alliance between the Byzantines and the Western Turks, who were a constant threat to the Avars. The rapprochement between the Byzantines and Khagan Sizabul (or Silzibil) is dated to 562/63, when the first envoys of the Turks showed up in

²⁷ Fritze 1982, 82; Pohl 1988a, 48.

²⁸ Menander, *History*, fr. 8, 92–96 (ibidem, 261, n. 90–97); Corippus, *In Laudem Iustini* 3 (l. 231–401), 67–72; Turtledove 1977, 51; Kollautz 1980, 459–461; Fritze 1982, 62, 83; Pohl 1988a, 48–49; Madgearu 2007, 263; Nechaeva 2014, 87, 104; Liebeschuetz 2015, 441; Sarantis 2016, 55–56.

Constantinople. The intention of the Turks, who at that time lived to the east of the river Don, was not only to strengthen their ties to the Empire, but also to prevent the rapprochement between the Byzantines and the Avars. Justinian's alliance with Sizabul was, according to Theophanes of Byzantium, the reason for which the Avar demands were rejected by Justin II.²⁹ The new emperor thus continued the friendly relations with the Turkic khaganate. On the other hand, there was an economic and trade dimension to that policy, since because of the frequent conflicts with Persia, the Byzantines wanted to secure access to Chinese silk via trade routes across the Turkic khaganate. The silk trade was one of the first points on the agenda both of the Turkic embassy that came to Constantinople in 568 (or in early 569),³⁰ and of the Byzantine envoys headed by Zemarchos, the *magister militum* of the East, who went to the Western Turks in August 569.³¹ Stephanos Kordoses assumes that the first contact of the two sides is dated to 553, when, according to an inscription in Kül Tegin, the Byzantines (*Purum*) had sent a delegation on the occasion of the death of the Bou-min, the khagan of the Turks.³²

During the early Middle Ages, after the imposition of the power of the Turks over Central Asia, as well as the expansion of Sogdian influence in that region, the Silk Road contributed to the economic and cultural development of many urban centers, particularly those in southern Kazakhstan and in the valleys of the rivers Talas, Chu and Illi (such as Otrar, Taraz, Navaket, Bountzikent, Sauran, and others).³³ The need for communication with Central Asia bypassing the Persian territory increased the importance of the northern Silk Road, which Zemarchos followed on his diplomatic mission to the Turkic khaganate. The northern Silk Road led from the river Yaxartes in Central Asia to Sogdia, through the steppe of Kazakhstan, and skirting the Caspian Sea, it reached the Black Sea in Crimea. Another important trade route led from Panticapaeum/Bosporus (modern Kerch) to the rivers Dnieper, Bug, Dniester and Danube. The access to the Byzantine Empire was also possible through the trade road of the valley of Kuban and the passes of the Caucasus in Georgia and Lazica,

29 Theophanes Byzantius, *Fragments*, 2, 270; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 239; Pohl 1988a, 40–41; Kordoses 2011, 298; Golden 2011a, 72; Graff 2016, 136.

30 Menander, *History*, fr. 10. 1, 110–116 (ibidem, 262, n. 110); Theophanes, *Chronography*, 245; Avenarius 1974, 41, 87; Turtledove 1977, 152–154; Czeplédy 1983, 106; Pohl 1988a, 42; Stark 2008, 296–297; Luttwak 2009, 98, 104; Kordoses 2011, 296–297; Asadov 2016, 38.

31 Menander, *History*, fr. 10. 2–3, 116–122 (ibidem, 263, n. 126); Theophanes Byzantius, *Fragments*, 3, 270–271; Turtledove 1977, 154–161; Pohl 1988a, 42–43, 179; Scharlipp 1992, 26–27; Harmatta 2000, 249–250; Nechaeva 2007, 153–155, 159–160; eadem 2014, 136–140, 144–151; Luttwak 2009, 97–100; Kordoses 2011, 297–298; Asadov 2016, 38–39.

32 Kordoses 2011, 298.

33 Bajpakov 1998, 13–18; Burnasheva 1998, 53–54.

which used Sogdian merchants in the seventh and eighth century.³⁴ From the rapprochement of the Byzantines with the Western Turks it is evident that the orientation of the empire to defend its interests in the East European steppes had turned towards Sizabul. The Avars, as enemies of the Western Turks, had no place in the geopolitical plans of Byzantium in that area.

Emperor Justin's rejection of the Avar demands forced Baian to turn for a second time to the West. One year later, in 566, the Avars attacked Thuringia again, defeated the army of Sigibert and retreated after receiving foodstuffs and many animals.³⁵ Alexander Avenarius, Wolfgang Fritze and Peter Schreiner believed that the attack had been instigated by the Byzantines, who probably supported the Avars with money and weapons.³⁶ Walter Pohl did not associate the Avar attack with Justin's rejection of the Avar demands, or the fear of the empire's power. Rather, the Avars suffered from the threat of the Turks in the east and, primarily, the problem of provisioning that they encountered during the winter of 565/66. The same scholar pointed out that, after their defeat, the Franks had to supply the Avars with foodstuffs, while the next year the Lombards, when allied with the Avars to neutralize the Gepids (see below), offered the Avars part of their animals.³⁷

After the campaign in Thuringia, the Avars returned to their temporary area of settlement. However, between 566 and 568 many radical changes took place in the northern borderlands of the Byzantine Empire, which turned the Avars from wandering nomads to rulers of the Middle Danube region. In the area between Lower Austria and the Carpathian Mountains, two peoples had settled as federates of Byzantium, the Gepids in the east and the Lombards in the west. The territory of the Gepids included Transylvania, the plain between the Danube and Tisza, as well as the area between the Sava and the Danube. There Sirmium was located (Sremska Mitrovica), the seat of the king of the Gepids Cunimund. The remaining part of the former Roman Pannonia, to west from the river Danube, was under the control of the Lombards, who initially, in 508, put an end to the control exercised by Heruls over southern Moravia and northeastern Lower Austria.

The Byzantines, seeking to control events in the region, incited clashes between the Gepids and the Lombards. In 566 the imperial government helped

34 Haussig 1992, 166–167, 170–171; idem 1988, 39–43; Klimkeit 1988, 12; Asadov 2016, 38–39.

35 Gregory of Tours, *Books of Histories*, iv. 29, 161–162; Menander, *History*, fr. 8, 96 and fr. 11, 126–128 (ibidem, 267, n. 151); Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 11. 10, 79; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 165, 228; Avenarius 1974, 57–58; Fritze 1982, 78–79, 82; Pohl 1988a, 49–50; Whitby 2004, 90; Schimpff 2007, 401 (in 567).

36 Avenarius 1974, 59; Fritze 1982, 84; Schreiner 1985, 200.

37 Pohl 1988a, 50.

the Gepids defeat the Lombards and restored the balance of power in the Middle Danube after the initial victory of the latter. Having been defeated by the Gepids, the Lombards sought the support of the Avars, who saw in this rapprochement a chance to settle in the Carpathian Basin, bypassing the reactions of Constantinople. Khagan Baian, in order to ally himself with the king of the Lombards Alboin, asked for a tenth of all the animals of the Lombards and, in case of a victory, for all the land of the Gepids, as well as half of the plunder obtained from them. Alboin, having already decided to migrate to Italy, accepted the proposal of the Avars. He also suggested to Baian the addition of his own territory of Pannonia, in the case that he would manage to move to the Italian peninsula. The offer was tempting for the Avars, as the territory of both Gepids and Lombards largely matched Baian's ambitions and was also suitable for the Avar nomadic way of life thanks to its wide plains.

The only hope that Cunimund had to avoid the dissolution of his kingdom by the Avars and the Lombards was the Byzantine Empire, from which he asked for help, promising to surrender Sirmium in exchange. However, Justin II showed no will to prevent the destruction of the Gepids. In 567 the Lombards attacked the Gepids and defeated the army of Cunimund, who fell on the battlefield. The Gepidic kingdom collapsed, and the Avars, who had little involvement in the hostilities, occupied the Gepidic territory as provided in their agreement with Alboin, except the territory of Sirmium. These events changed the balance of power in Central Europe. With the collapse of the Gepidic kingdom and the departure of the Lombards on 2 April 568, Pannonia came under the direct control of the Avars, who earlier had asked for a much smaller territory from the Byzantines. Ten years after the first Avar embassy to Constantinople, the only neighbors that Byzantine Empire had to the north of the river Danube were the Avars, who would turn out to be far more dangerous than both the Gepids and the Lombards.³⁸ The migration of the Lombards followed likely part of the native provincial Romanised population, namely people from Noricum and Pannonia.³⁹

38 On the changes between 566 and 568 in the Middle Danube area, see Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 166–167; Wolfram 1987, 347–348; Pohl 1988a, 50–57; Christou 1991, 98–106; Kiss 1992, 36–37; Pózán 2015, 135–144; Sarantis 2016, 53–54. See also the study of Johannes Preiser-Kapeller (2018, 311–324) regarding the – possible – impact of the palaeoenvironmental factors on the development and decline of the Avar khaganate.

39 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, II, 26, 87; Certum est autem, tunc Alboin multos secum ex diversis, quas vel alii reges vel ipse ceperat, gentibus ad Italiam adduxisse. Unde usque hodie eorum in quibus habitant vicos Gepidos, Vulgares, Sarmatas, Panonios, Suavos, Noricos, sive aliis huiuscemodi nominibus appellamus; Vida, 2009, 236.

A key question in those events is the neutrality of the imperial government in the conflict leading to the dissolution of the Gepidic kingdom, if not an outright acceptance of the outcome. The attitude of Justin II may be interpreted as an attempt to solve the “Avar problem” within the general framework of the empire’s policy on the Danube. Probably, the victory of the Avars over Sigibert I in 566 alarmed the Byzantines, who may have expected for the Avars to be defeated by the Franks. New frictions with the Avars could be avoided if they acquired land for settlement, namely the Gepidic territory. On the other hand, the presence of the Lombards would allow Byzantium to continue maintaining the earlier balance of power in the Middle Danube region. The migration of the Lombards to Italy overthrew the Byzantine “control system” in the region, which had been established by Anastasius I, as there was now no counterweight to the power of the Avars.

As main beneficiaries of those developments, the Avars established a powerful Khaganate in Central Europe, in an area most appropriate for their nomadic way of life (stockbreeding), which had previously served the Huns as well. However, the expansion of their settlements in the occupied territory was gradual. According to the archaeological data, the rivers Danube and Tisza surrounded the initial settlement and the center of the Khaganate. To the west of the Middle Danube (the territory of the Roman province of Pannonia) the Avar settlements appeared mostly after ca. 600. A similar process may be observed at the eastern part of the Khaganate, in Transylvania. Furthermore, the main points of attraction for the Avars were the Roman roads, settlements, and fortifications.⁴⁰ The Avars controlled some Slavic tribes on the Lower Danube, and, despite the lack of written testimonies, Moravia, Bohemia and part of Lower Austria may have been also controlled by them.⁴¹ The Avar khaganate had a quite heterogeneous population, which, besides the ruling Avars, included Romance populations, Bulgars (Kutrigurs and Utigurs), Gepids, Slavs etc.⁴²

40 Fritze 1982, 63–64; Pohl 1988a, 91–92; Daim 2003, 469; Stanciu 2008, 424; Vida 2008, 16, 37, who notes that no Early Avar assemblages have been found to the west of the Savaria-Sopianae line (a line linking present-day Szombathely to Keszthely and Pécs); idem 2016, 253, 256; Erwin 2014, 295–323. On the extension of the Avar settlements in the seventh and eighth c., see ch. 4.3, n. 57.

41 Dvornik 1970, 44, 63; Fritze 1982, 64.

42 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 181–199; Czeglédy 1983, 118; Pohl 1987, 41–52; idem 1988a, 216–221, 225–236; idem 2003, 578–584; Szentpéteri 1993, 233; Ziemann 2007, 104; Vida 2008, 13–46; idem 2016, 251, 253, 255.

1.3 The Conflicts of Justin II with the Avars

After the collapse of the Gepidic kingdom, the Avars failed to occupy Sirmium as the city immediately came under control of the Byzantine general Bonus. The movement of Bonus caused a perpetual tension in the Byzantine-Avar relations. The important city-fortress for the defense of the Balkans once again came under Byzantine control after 125 years, as it had initially fallen in the hands of the Huns in 442, and later into those of the Gepids (in 454). The latter turned Sirmium into their political and ecclesiastical seat. Once they settled in Pannonia, the Avars moved against Sirmium, which they considered to be theirs by virtue of the former Gepid occupation and claims. The first siege of Sirmium is described in the story of how the Byzantine envoys Comitas and Vitalian were captured before the outbreak of hostilities “in contravention of the universally recognized rights of ambassadors.” The Avar assault was accompanied by loud drums and led to the wounding of general Bonus.⁴³

The first siege of Sirmium by the Avars was not successful. However, the envoys of the Avars, with whom Bonus negotiated the terms of the peace, formulated a number of demands, which would mark their policy towards the empire in the coming years. The Avars put forward the argument that, having conquered the land of the Gepids, Sirmium had come under their control and that the occupation of the city by the Byzantines, as well as the asylum that the Byzantines had provided to Usdibad, the Gepid commander of Sirmium, were a cause of war. The Avars also argued against Justin’s attitude towards khagan Baian, as the emperor did not fulfill the obligations arising from Byzantine-Avar alliance in 558. Bonus, having rejected the demands of the Avars on grounds that they were invaders of Byzantine territory, replied that the emperor had given money to them and proposed to the khagan to send a delegation to Constantinople for the conclusion of peace.⁴⁴

The Avars were forced to withdraw from Sirmium without either an annual tribute or even a few gifts that the khagan had asked from the Byzantine general.⁴⁵ However, Baian sent 10,000 Kutrigurs to attack Dalmatia. In relation to that raid, the Kutrigurs are mentioned for the last time in the sources. Their

43 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 3–5, 130–132 (ibidem, 267, n. 154–155); Kollautz 1980, 464; Pohl 1988a, 58 (in 567); Whitby 2004, 91; Građanin 2009, 8–9; Golden 2011a, 96; Nechaeva 2014, 62–63, 134; Liebeschuetz 2015, 441. On the date of the first siege of Sirmium (567 or 568), see Pohl, op. cit., 354, ch. 3. 1, n. 1.

44 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 5, 134–136; Pohl 1988a, 58–59; idem 1988b, 264; Nechaeva 2014, 97.

45 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 5, 134–136 (Blockley): For when I passed through Scythia I brought nothing, and it is impossible for me to leave here too without some gain ... For Baian did not wish to receive much, no more than a silver plate, a small amount of gold

subsequent history is unknown and is considered possible that they were either assimilated by the Avars or they were subsequently referred by the general name “Bulgars.”⁴⁶ Although the negotiations between the two sides did not lead to a new treaty, the cessation of hostilities had positive impact for both opponents. The Avar khagan, who was still not able to conduct a long-standing war, took advantage of the peace with Byzantium in order to consolidate his power in the Carpathian Basin. On the other hand, the reversal and confrontational policy of Justin seemed fruitful at a glance: keeping Sirmium and putting a stop to the gifts granted to the Avars had strengthened the position of the Empire on the Danube. Furthermore, from 569 to 572, he succeeded in renewing both the alliance with the Turks and the peace with the Persians, thus avoiding temporarily the war on the eastern frontiers.⁴⁷

The achievement of peace between the Byzantines and the Avars did not break the diplomatic efforts for the settlement of the open questions. A few months after the siege of Sirmium, the Avars sent an embassy to Vitalian in order to seek a treaty with Byzantium. All that they gained was 800 gold coins under the presupposition to conduct no raids as long as the peace lasted. Vitalian went along with Targitius to Constantinople, where the Avar envoy raised again the “package” of Baian’s demands, namely the surrender of Sirmium, as well as of Usdibad and his escort (the khagan considered them to be his subjects), and the annual tribute that Justinian had bestowed to the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs, who had now come under the rule of Baian. The attitude of Justin left no room for further negotiations. The emperor refused all Avar demands, told Targitius that he was ready for war, and commanded Bonus to be prepared for possible Avar attacks.⁴⁸ The following year (569), Targitius went again to Constantinople and repeated the claims of Baian, only to be met with the same uncompromising response. The emperor did not wish to continue talking with Targitius, and entrusted the negotiations to the *comes excubitorum* Tiberius.⁴⁹

The demands that Targitius presented to Justin are sufficient for evaluating Baian’s tactics, as the Avars were not ready for a total military confrontation

and a Scythian tunic; (ibidem, 267, n. 158); Avenarius 1974, 85–86; Pohl 1988a, 60, 180, 205; Pallas-Brown 2000, 314; Nechaeva 2014, 171, 182–183.

46 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 5, 136; Kollautz 1968, 135; idem 1980, 467; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 239–240; Fritze 1982, 62; Pohl 1988a, 39, 60; Ziemann 2007, 101; Golden 2011a, 107.

47 Turtledove 1977, 108–109; Pohl 1988a, 60–61; Sarantis 2013c, 20; idem 2013d, 797.

48 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 6, 138–142 (138, Blockley): ... the city of Sirmium, the yearly payments which the Emperor Justinian used to give to the Kutrigurs and Utigurs (since today Baian is the master of all these tribes) ... (ibidem, 268, n. 161–162); Avenarius 1974, 86; Pohl 1988a, 61–63; idem 2003, 578; Ziemann 2007, 101–102; Gradanin 2009, 9.

49 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 7, 142; Kollautz 1980, 473; Pohl 1988a, 63. Gradanin 2009, 9.

with Constantinople. In this phase, Baian did not request a specified amount of money from the Byzantines, but referred to “acquired rights,” while seeking recognition for his status as ally of the Empire. The 568 and 569 Avar delegations to Constantinople showed that the Avars wanted an agreement, and their aggressive attitude was aimed to exert pressure for that purpose.⁵⁰ From the political point of view, the primary goal of the Avars was to enter into alliance (*foedus*) with the Byzantine state (see below) either by peaceful negotiations or by attacks, which would force Constantinople to pay annual tribute. The Byzantine gold was crucial for the survival and the internal coherence of the Khaganate as it was secured the loyalty to the khagan through the distribution of the prestige goods and the booty to his subjects (the so-called “prestige economy”). The steady flow of wealth of a “predatory state” rendered lucrative the occupation of warrior and prevented social unrest. The situation changed when the Avars lost the annual tribute from Byzantium in the aftermath of their defeat at Constantinople in 626.⁵¹

In 570, Baian sent another embassy under Apsikh in order to achieve a treaty with Byzantium. According to Menander the Guardsman, the Avars asked for land for settlement and Tiberius agreed, asking the sons of prominent Avars to be sent as hostages to Constantinople. As the whole Pannonia north of the Danube was already under their control, Ilona Kovrig and Walter Pohl believed therefore that the Avars were in fact asking for Pannonia II, the land previously offered to them by Justinian. This was in fact a formerly Gepidic territory in the area of Sirmium. However, it is more likely that the Avar demand concerned the *de jure* recognition from Byzantium of the Avar rule over the former Gepidic territory, as well as the transfer from the Gepids to the Avars of the status of federates. The two sides did not finally come in agreement as Emperor Justin wanted the khagan to submit his own sons as hostages. Justin's purpose was to present himself ready for war and he preferred, instead to conclude treaty, to clash with the Avars.⁵² The information we have about the conflict that followed is the victory that Tiberius obtained against the Avars in 570 in Thrace.⁵³

50 Pohl 1988a, 62–63, 207.

51 Pohl 1988a, 183–185; idem 1992, 17–18; Nechaeva 2014, 171–172; Vida 2016, 254–255; Heinrich-Tamáska 2016d, 274; Curta 2016, 73.

52 Menander, *History*, fr. 15. 1, 148 (ibidem, 270, n. 173–174); Kovrig 1955, 178; Kollautz 1980, 473–474; Pohl 1988a, 63–64; Nechaeva 2014 54–55; Liebeschuetz 2015, 442.

53 John of Biclaro, *Chronicle*, 212, 570? (Anno IV Iustini imp.) 3: Iustinus imp. per Tiberium excubitorum comitem in Thracia bellum genti Avarum ingerit et victor Tiberius Constantinopolim redit; Avenarius 1974, 87; Kollautz 1980, 475; Pohl 1988a, 64; Madgearu 1996, 36; Whitby 2004, 91; Građanin 2009, 9–10; Liebeschuetz 2015, 442.

Justin's demand about the khagan's sons must have been a diplomatic maneuver to lead the negotiations to a blank wall. Justin was at that time seeking to inflict a surprising and decisive blow onto the Avars, in order to secure the Empire's position in the Balkans when troops would be moved to the Persian front. Although Justin was forced to confront both Avars and Persians, he tried to limit the time of the war on two fronts, as a military success against the Avars would suspend, for some time, their claims for payment of an annual tribute and concession of land for settlement. Also, a treaty with the Avars, equivalent to that of 558, was not of great importance for Justin at that moment. First, there were no people against whom he could rely on the Avars, in exchange for presents or money. Second, after the withdrawal of the Lombards, the balance of power in the Middle Danube had collapsed. In any case, confronting the Avars militarily was definitely Justin's pragmatic policy after 568.

The military success of Justin in 570 indeed put the Avars in a difficult position and they did not undertake any aggressive or diplomatic initiative until 574. Justin, however, soon found himself in a disadvantageous position with the outbreak of the twenty-year Persian war in 572, and he was forced to withdraw a large part of his forces from the Balkan provinces.⁵⁴ The Avars viewed that as their chance to counterbalance the numbers that had led to their defeat in 570. Having before them only small Byzantine forces, they attacked in 574 and defeated Tiberius, who ran from the possible danger of being taken captive. The Avars gained territory in Pannonia II but failed to conquer Sirmium, which was their main objective since 568.⁵⁵

The victory of the Avars, coupled with the events in Constantinople, altered the attitude of the Byzantines towards Baian. In December 574, Tiberius acquired the title of *Caesar* and became co-emperor alongside Justin, who, being sick, could not exercise the actual governing power any more.⁵⁶ Tiberius concluded a treaty with the Avars, whose terms remain unknown, except for the annual tribute. The treaty of 574 was the first in which the Byzantines agreed to pay the Avars with a fixed amount of money as annual tribute, namely 80,000 gold coins.⁵⁷ On their way back from Constantinople, the Avar envoys,

54 See Turtledove 1977, 230ff.; Dignas and Winter 2007, 41–43, 109–115.

55 Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, E 11, 578–580; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 246–247. Avenarius 1974, 87 (in 573); Pohl 1988a, 64; Građanin 2009, 10–11.

56 Menander, *History*, fr. 18. 1, 156 (ibidem, 272, n. 191); Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, E 11, 578; Turtledove 1977, 70–78; Whitby 2004, 94–95.

57 Menander, *History*, fr. 15. 5, 150. The information concerning the amount of the annual tribute is known from the account of Targitius' embassy of 579. See Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 1, 216–218 (216, Blockley): When this year Baian as usual sent Targitius to the emperor to receive the agreed payment (which was eighty thousand nomismata per

however, were attacked by Skamar brigands. Tiberius had to pay back to the Avars a portion of the valuables seized by Skamars.⁵⁸

The annual tribute of 574 was regarded in the Byzantine Empire as good solution to the problem of keeping the Avars at bay. As such, the tribute was not associated with earlier gifts, and, possibly, money that had been paid to the Avars between 558 and 574. Some scholars have interpreted the gifts bestowed upon the Avars since 558 in connection with the alliance between Justinian and Baian as a way of enrolling the Avars in the service of Byzantium as *federates* (*foederati*).⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, the Avars are mentioned as *foederati* only by John of Ephesus.⁶⁰ If one accepts his testimony, he will then need to examine the conditions pertaining to that status and, on the other hand, whether such a treaty between Byzantium and the Avars took place in reality, given what is already known about the negotiations between 558 and 574.

According to the older treaties of Constantine I and Theodosius I with the Goths in 332 and 382, respectively, the federates were bestowed regular yearly payments (known as *syntaxeis*, *sitiseis*, *annonae foederaticae* etc.), which were equivalent to the payment for the *limitanei*. In addition, federates received land for settlement. Theodosius I also granted gifts to the rulers of the Goths. All those stipulations formed the terms of the treaty known as *foedus*. In exchange, the federates were expected to provide military support, with their troops included into the imperial army.⁶¹ The Avars probably knew the terms of the *foedus*, as indicated by the demands made by their first envoys to Justinian I in 558. The Byzantine emperor refused to give them either land for settlement or the yearly payments, but he sent presents.⁶² The fact that the Avars immediately turned against other people's suggests that they were likely paid to do so by Justinian, but there is no mention of a regular yearly subsidy, as it was the demand of the Avar envoy Kandikh.

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- year) ... (ibidem, 283, n. 294–295); Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 147–148; Turtledove 1977, 116; Pohl 1988a, 65; Synelli 1989, 243–244; Whitby 2004, 97; Ziemann 2007, 105.
- 58 Menander, *History*, fr. 15. 6, 150 (ibidem, 270–271, n. 178–179); Waldmüller 1976, 104; Pohl 1988a, 65; Whitby 2004, 98. On the Skamars, see Dmitrev 1952, 3–14.
- 59 Avenarius 1974, 44–45; Fritze 1982, 61; Pohl 1988a, 19, 206; Mazal 2001, 193.
- 60 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 24, 246: de populo foedo qui vocantur Auares. ibidem, XLV–XLIX, 259: Et stimulus rursus contra Romanos surrexit a populo barbarorum foedorum crines tortos gerentium qui vocantur Auares, qui a finibus orientis migraverant et exierant,...
- 61 On the *foederati* and the relevant treaties see Chrysos 1973, 52–64; Wolfram 1983, 5–35; Scharf 2001; Sarantis 2016, 45–48.
- 62 Menander, *History*, fr. 5. 1, 48 (Blockley): The Emperor should make an alliance with them and enjoy their efficient protection. But they would only be well-disposed to the Roman state in exchange for the most valuable presents, yearly payments and very fertile land to inhabit. See above, n. 2.

When they showed up again in Constantinople in 562, the envoys of the Avars again asked for land for settlement within the Empire. Since they only asked for land, Walter Pohl assumed that the khagan had already secured the yearly payments, and had thus been entered the service of the Empire (namely through a *foedus*). However, no defrayment of subsidies is mentioned by Menander in relation to the embassy of 558, while, as mentioned, federates normally received simultaneously and not gradually all three concessions. Much like in 558, the envoys of 562 left Constantinople only with presents.⁶³ Among the latter the Avars used to receive from Justinian, Menander the Guardsman mentions gilded cords, couches, and other luxury objects.⁶⁴ Justinian's gifts for the Avars are also mentioned by John of Ephesus.⁶⁵

When Justin II received the Avar envoys in 565, Targitius asked the emperor to continue Justinian's provision of presents, and to add something more to them. Again, there is no mention of any annual payment (tribute), which was in fact on Targitius' agenda.⁶⁶ Justin refused any alliance with the Avars, while pointing out that, if he were to make concessions to them, that would be a reward for some service (free gift), and not an annual tribute.⁶⁷ In the course of this negotiations, mention is made of the donations that Justinian I used to offer to the Avars, but without any payment.⁶⁸

A more disputable testimony may be found in Corippus, according to whom Targitius asked the *yearly subsidies* as well as the *presents* of Justinian in order to stay valid the peace treaty between Byzantium and the Avars.⁶⁹ Nonetheless,

63 Menander, *History*, fr. 5, 4, 52: ... they received their accustomed presents from him and were allowed to depart, having purchased whatever they required, both clothing and weaponry; Pohl 1988a, 19, 206; see also above, n. 23.

64 Menander, *History*, fr. 8, 92: During the reign of the younger Justin the envoys of the Avars came to Byzantium to receive the usual presents which the previous Emperor, Justinian, had given to their tribe. These were cords worked with gold which were made to confine what was escaping, and likewise couches and other luxury goods (ibidem, 261, n. 91); Pohl 1988a, 49; Pallas-Brown 2000, 316–317; Nechaeva 2011, 175–181, according to whom the meaning of *cords to confine what was escaping* is metaphoric, linked to the historiographical model of the “fugitive Avars” as well as to their position in the hierarchy of the Empire; eadem 2014, 180–182. See also Introduction 2, n. 79.

65 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 24, 246: Quorum legatos cum recepisset, eos auro et argento, et vestibibus, et zonis, et ephippiis aureis ditavit, et ceteris rebus quas eis dedit et per eos principibus eorum misit, ita ut mirarentur et alios rursus mitterent; Pohl 1988a, 180.

66 See above, n. 28.

67 Menander, *History*, fr. 8, 94; Pohl 1988a, 49, 211; Nechaeva 2011, 178. The negative attitude of Justin towards the Avars in 565 is interpreted as resulting to an interruption of the *foedus* between the Avars and Justinian I in 558. See Fritze 1982, 62, 83; Mazal 2001, 194.

68 See above, n. 64.

69 Corippus, *In Laudem Iustini* 111, 70, 303–307 (108): annua praelargi patris solacia vestri sumere tempus adest. sanctus quae praebuit ille, vos etiam praebere decet. si foedera pacis

even someone may consider the first as bestow of money, it was not accompanied by per permission for settlement. Judging from the words Menander or Corippus put in Targitius' mouth, the Avars seem to have taken Justinian's presents as a defrayment of tribute. Justin asked the Avars if they would declare war as long as he did not conclude a treaty (*pacta*, payment of tribute) with them and he used the term *dona* (presents) for what the Avars had previously received from Justinian.⁷⁰

During the negotiations following the 568 siege of Sirmium, and according to the speech attributed to Bonus, the Avar envoys asked for *σπονδαί* (treaty and peace) to terminate the hostilities.⁷¹ The Avars desired to become an ally (namely federates) of the Empire, which is why the Avar envoys were sent to ask again for *σπονδαί* later in that same year.⁷² At that time, Targitius delivered a speech, from which it is clear that the Avars, who had obviously not obtained the yearly payments on their own, regarded as "rightly their" the tribute that Constantinople used to pay to the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs, as both peoples were now under the Avar rule. However, his demand was rejected by Justin. Targitius clearly speaks of *yearly payments*, but as far as the Avar khagan was concerned, he obtained only *presents*.⁷³ Menander carefully chose his words to draw a distinction between the *yearly payments* paid to the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs, on one hand, and the *usual/accustomed presents* of Justinian to the Avars.⁷⁴ In any case, they were *συντάξεις* because they were regular. That much results from the technical term Menander employs to describe the next delegation of Targitius in 569, when the Avar envoy asked for the retrospective payment of the annual *συντάξεις* that the two tribes used to receive before their subordination to the Avars.⁷⁵ Furthermore, as was mentioned, Menander records that in 570, the Avar envoy Apsikh raised only the issue of the Avar settlement, while the treaty of 574, following the Byzantine-Avar war of that year, for the first time dealt with the payment of a concrete yearly tribute.

intemerata tibi, si mavis pacta manere, debita quaerenti transmittes munera regi (ibidem, 192, n. 303); Nechaeva 2011, 178.

70 Corippus, *Laudem* III, 71, 345–349; Nechaeva 2011, 178–179. On the meaning of the technical term *pacta* see Synelli 1989, 234–250.

71 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 5, 134.

72 Ibidem, fr. 12. 6, 138.

73 See above, n. 48.

74 See above, n. 63–64.

75 Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 7, 142 (Blockley): Baian wished the city of Sirmium ... and also the money which Justinian paid every year to the Huns. Because they had not received this for the previous years, Targitius asked that he receive all of it in a lump sum and that in future the Romans make the agreed yearly payments.

The only exception to what sources have to say about the defrayment of money to Baian is Bonus's speech to the Avar envoys after the siege of Sirmium in 568.⁷⁶ As it becomes obvious from the examination of all the relevant fragments, Justin not only refused to bestow yearly payments to the Avars, but he suspended even the presents that Justinian used to send to the khagan. The payments to which Bonus refers were to be offered for some exceptional reason (by analogy to the subsidies to which Justinian may have agreed to in 558), and not as regular, yearly payments. They were, according to Emperor Justin II's words of 565, a *free gift* for service, and not a tribute. Such a contingency substantiates Alexander Avenarius, Wolfgang Fritze and Peter Schreiner's idea that the Byzantines incited and financially supported the Avar attack on the Franks in 566.⁷⁷

Summarizing the testimony of the sources on the Avar claims and the Byzantine concessions, it appears that no simultaneous provision took place of regular annual payments, land for settlement, and presents, which would have turned the Avars into federates of Byzantium. Even if one accepts the idea that Justinian I bestowed some payments (which is not clear from the account of the 558 embassy), those were not regular, but of a voluntary nature. There is, in other words, no basis in the sources for the idea that the Avars ever acquired the status of federates, with all the relative provisions as well as obligations, nor is there any evidence that Justinian's gifts were accompanied by regular annual payments.

1.4 The Byzantine-Avar Cooperation against the Slavs and the Fall of Sirmium

The treaty of 574 resulted in a suspension of hostilities between the Avars and Byzantines until 579 and allowed Tiberius to gather all of his forces against the Persians, now the main opponent of the Empire. A little later, the political and military situation changed drastically when the Turks, who had expanded until then into the steppes north of the Black Sea, directly threatened the Avar khaganate. Although they did not attack the Avars, the Turks disliked the Byzantine-Avar treaty of 574. When a Byzantine delegation under Valentinus went to the Turks in 576, Turxanthus, who had succeeded Sizabul, accused the Byzantines of hypocrisy, for they had made a treaty with the "fugitives"

⁷⁶ Menander, *History*, fr. 12. 5, 134 (Blockley): Furthermore, the Emperor had decided to give you money and handed it to envoys to you.

⁷⁷ See above, n. 35–36.

Uarchonites (Avars), the “slaves” of the Turks. To avenge Tiberius, Turxanthus sent troops to the Crimea, and, along with the army of the Utigur ruler Anagaeus, occupied the city of Bosphorus.⁷⁸

In the Balkans, the Byzantines had to face the attacks of the Slavic tribes, which resumed after a relatively long lull. The Slavs (Sclaveni) of the Lower Danube, like the Antes, had caused problems with their raids since the reign of Justin I (518–527). Even after 530, they still devastated the Byzantine provinces. The Byzantine army repelled the invaders either with military operations or through the construction of an extensive fortifications’ system that was built by Justinian I.⁷⁹ After 558, many Slavic tribes passed gradually under the Avar rule and were conducting joint raids on the Byzantine territory.⁸⁰ The Slavic raids were intense during the joint rule of Justin II and Tiberius (565–578) and the latter’s sole reign (578–582).⁸¹ Confronting them became very difficult for the Byzantines after the outbreak of the Persian war in 572, and the subsequent transfer of a great part of the Byzantine army to the East.

Despite the lack of sufficient troops in the Balkans, time was ripe for the Byzantines to deal with the Slavs, as their interests coincided with those of the Avars. The khagan Baian, convinced that he would find plenty of booty in the Sclavene lands, unsuccessfully attempted to impose tribute upon the Slavs of the chieftain Daurentius (or Dauritas), who lived in modern Walachia and southern Moldavia. The chieftain’s rebuttal provoked a struggle that resulted in the murder of the Avar envoys by the Slavs. In addition, as Menander points out, Baian “was not hostile towards the Romans, and, indeed, from the very beginning of Tiberius’ reign had wished to be friendly with our state,” likely because he was not yet strong enough for a long-standing war with Byzantium. An advocate of a policy of peaceful relations with the Avars, Tiberius took advantage of the moment and sent an embassy to Baian, asking him to follow a military operation against the Slavs.

This military cooperation between the Byzantines and the Avars in 578 is the only one mentioned in the sources. The Avars undertook the main part of

78 Menander, *History*, fr. 19. 1–2, 170–178 (ibidem, 277–278, n. 233, 235); Alexandrowna-Pletnewa 1978, 27; Czeglédý 1983, 106; Pohl 1988a, 67, 213; Scharlipp 1992, 27; Ziemann 2007, 79, 102; Nechaeva 2007, 156–159; eadem 2011, 176–178; eadem 2014, 48–49, 104, 144–145; Golden 2011b, 141; Aibabin 2013, 60.

79 Velkov 1987, 152–161; Curta 2001a, 74–89, who argues that the Justinianian fortifications prevented the Slavic attacks from 552 until 576/77.

80 Waldmüller 1976, 105–106; Fritze 1982, 62, 67; Fine 1983, 28–29; Velkov 1987, 161; Madgearu 1996, 35–36.

81 Popović 1975, 450; Waldmüller 1976, 106–108; Madgearu 1996, 36–38; Curta 2001a, 91–92; Ziemann 2007, 105–106.

the expedition assisted by John, who, according to Menander the Quardsman, was commander of Illyricum as well as of the “isles” (quaestor exercitus). The latter provided a fleet for the transportation of 60,000 Avars – a clearly exaggerated number – across the Danube and into the Byzantine territory, then, upon reaching Scythia Minor, one more time across the river, into the barbarian territory. However, despite the great mobilization, no conflict took place. The Slavs hid into the thick forest, and the Avars simply destroyed the Slavic settlements and fields left without defense.⁸² According to the claims of the khagan’s envoys of 579, the Avars managed also to free a great number of Byzantine captives from previous Slavic raids.⁸³

One issue related to the Byzantine-Avar military cooperation of 578 is that of the Byzantine army of 15,000 raised to be sent to the Persian front as reinforcements for general Maurice (the future emperor).⁸⁴ According to Ernst Stein, those were Avar troops in exchange for Byzantine help against the Slavs, but Walter Pohl has also suggested that those were redeemed non-Avar, lightly armored troops subordinated to the khagan.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, Theophanes makes no mention of Avar troops sent to Tiberius, but writes of ἀγοράσας σώματα ἑθνικῶν, namely redemption of mercenaries regardless of their origin. Moreover, the event is dated by Theophanes to 581/82, in the fourth year of the reign of Tiberius, so it coincided in time with the Avar siege of Sirmium (579–582). In my view, Cyril Mango and Roger Scott’s translation of ἑθνικοί is wrong: its meaning is not “aliens,” but either “pagans” or “gentes” (nations). When interpreting this passage, one should take into account the testimony of Evagrius, who states that Tiberius recruited a huge number of mercenaries for the needs of the Persian war. Even the number given (150,000 men) is exaggerate, the “new army” included mercenaries “from the Alps, the Rhine, Pannonia, Moesia, Slavs, Scythians, Illyrians and Isaurians,”⁸⁶ and those troops could not have been sent by the khagan.

82 On the common Byzantine-Avar operation against the Slavs, see Menander, *History*, fr. 21, 192–194; Avenarius 1974, 87–89; Waldmüller 1976, 107–108; Pohl 1988a, 66–69. Madgearu 1996, 37–38; Curta 2001a, 91–92; Kardaras 2007, 31–33; Angelova and Buchvarov 2007, 63; Liebeschuetz 2015, 442. On the date of the operation, see Pohl, op. cit., 357, ch. 3, n. 16.

83 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 1, 218; Avenarius 1974, 89; Waldmüller 1976, 108.

84 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 251, 373 (Mango and Scott, 373, AM 6074, AD 581/2. Tiberius, 4th year): The emperor Tiberius, having bought contingents of aliens, formed them into an army bearing his own name, 15, 000 men whom he clothed and armed; Ioannis Zonaras, *Epitomae Historiarum*, 14, 11, 181–182 (12,000 ἑθνικῶν); Kardaras 2007, 32.

85 See Stein 1919, 71–72, 85–86, n. 15; Pohl 1988a, 69–70; Kardaras, Byzantine-Avar cooperation, 32.

86 Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, E 14, 584; Turtledove 1977, 231.

Despite the large scale and well-organized operations against the Slavs, the expedition itself did not achieve the expected results either for Tiberius or the khagan Baian, as the aggressive activity of the Slavic tribes in the Eastern Balkans did not stop. The military cooperation between the two sides in 578 was a one-time event that simultaneously marked the end of peaceful relations. Although the conciliatory policy of Tiberius towards the Avars differed from that of Justin II, it was evident that it could not secure a long period of peace. The lack of military forces, along with the ambitions of Baian, had already paved the way for challenging the Byzantine rule south of the Danube. After a period of twenty years (558–578), during which the two sides had been rarely involved in military conflicts, the Avars were now strong enough to claim more imperial territory. In 579 Baian put an end to the five-year peace with Byzantium and led his army to the river Sava, between Sirmium and Singidunum, where he ordered the construction of a bridge.⁸⁷

Tiberius interpreted the unexpected action of the khagan as a direct challenge to the Byzantine control of the region of Sirmium. At his meeting with the Byzantine general Sethus, who had his seat in Singidunum, the khagan claimed that he wished to continue the operations against the Slavs in order to obtain from them the tribute they owed, and to avenge the murder of his envoys. Any intervention by the Byzantines would result in end of the 574 treaty. To show that he had no intention to attack Byzantium, the khagan took an oath both on his sword, according to the Avar custom, and on the Bible.⁸⁸ Furthermore, an Avar embassy arrived in Constantinople to confirm the intentions of the khagan and to repeat for the emperor's ears the claim, according to which Baian wanted to campaign against the Slavs. The pretexts of the Avars, who even asked for the assistance of the Byzantine fleet, did not persuade Tiberius. The emperor assured them that he was consistent with the khagan's attack to the Slavs and, on the other hand, he tried to instill fear into them by pointing to a possible attack of the Turks. The Avar envoy, who was one of the supporters of the aggressive policy towards Byzantium, was killed by the Slavs, along with the other envoys, on their way back from Constantinople.⁸⁹

87 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 1, 218 (ibidem, 284, n. 296); *Suda lexicon* 111, K 2690, 212. (Ky-motomos); John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, xxx, 255, who states that the Avars constructed two bridges: Cum igitur populus barbarus Avarum collecti essent et hos duo pontes quosfecerunt tenerent, et regionibus Romanorum bellum et vastationem minantes considerent, ... Waldmüller 1976, 111–113; Kollautz 1980, 467–469; Pohl 1988a, 70–71, 194; Golden 2011a, 97; Liebeschuetz 2015, 442–443.

88 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 1, 218–222; Waldmüller 1976, 113–114; Kollautz 1980, 488; Pohl 1988a, 72; Nechaeva 2014, 97.

89 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 2, 222–224 (ibidem, 270–271, n. 178–179); Waldmüller 1976, 114–115; Kollautz 1980, 477; Pohl 1988a, 72, 178; Curta 2001a, 92, 96; Kordoses 2011, 299.

Shortly after that, a second embassy under Solakh made clear the real intentions of the khagan. After declaring that the bridge over the Sava River had been completed for an attack on Sirmium, Solakh demanded from the emperor the surrender of the city as well as the withdrawal of the army and the residents with their belongings. He further claimed that the aim of emperor had been to subdue the Avars either by war or by gifts, and repeated the argument that Sirmium belonged to the Avars because it had been as a possession of the Gepids.⁹⁰ The importance of Sirmium for the protection of the Balkan provinces left no room of negotiation involving its voluntary surrender to the Avars. Tiberius told the envoys that he would rather “give one of his daughters to Baian than surrender without a fight for the city.” He thus declared his determination to defend the city by all means possible as the fall of Sirmium would offer several advantages to the Avars. Tiberius expelled Solakh and tried, with the forces he had at his disposal, to organize the defense of the city. Also, according to John of Ephesus, the emperor sought for last-moment help from other peoples, but his efforts to approach the Lombards and the Turks were in vain.⁹¹

The coverage of the sources pertaining to the siege of Sirmium is patchy. During the siege, negotiations took place between the general Theognis and Baian, who made an imposing appearance, sitting on a golden throne and protected by shields in a large tent. The negotiations, however, had no palpable result, since the khagan demanded the surrender of the city, while the Byzantines wanted a general withdrawal of the Avars.⁹² With the bridge they had built, the Avars cut off the provision of the city arriving on the Sava, and, simultaneously, controlled the road between Singidunum and Sirmium. Furthermore, a part of the Avar army under Apsikh, who controlled a second bridge on the way from Sirmium to Dalmatia, joined the main army of the Avars, making a stifling ring around the city.⁹³ The fall of Sirmium was a matter of time as gaining provision was impossible and the population was beginning to feel the effects of the long-term blockade. The despair of the residents is expressed in an inscription found at Sirmium, which is dated just before its fall:

90 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 2, 224–226 (ibidem, 284, n. 301); Waldmüller 1976, 115–116; Kol-lautz 1980, 477–479; Pohl 1988a, 72–73, 212–213; Građanin 2009, 12.

91 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 2, 226 (ibidem, 284, n. 302); John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, xxx–xxxI, 255–256; Waldmüller 1976, 116–119; Fine 1983, 30; Pohl 1988a, 73–74; Shlosser 1994, 45; Liebeschuetz 2015, 439.

92 Menander, *History*, fr. 27. 2, 238; Waldmüller 1976, 117–118; Pohl 1988a, 74; Građanin 2009, 12–13; Nechaeva 2014, 97.

93 Menander, *History*, fr. 27. 3, 240 (ibidem, 285–286, n. 316, 318); Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 147; Avenarius 1974, 90–91; Fritze 1982, 63, 88; Pohl 1988a, 74; Bóna 2000, 168; Whitby 2004, 97–98; Građanin 2009, 12.

[Χριστέ] Κύριε, βοήτι τῆς πόλεος κέ ῥύξον τὸν ἀβαριν κέ πύλαξον τὴν Ῥωμανίαν κέ τὸν γράψαντα, ἀμήν.⁹⁴

During the negotiations for the surrender of the city, the khagan promised he would let the residents to leave in peace, but without their belongings. He declared that he would not ask for an increase of the annual tribute of 80,000 gold coins, but instead that the payments be made for the last three years (580–582). He also asked for the return of a shaman named Bookolabras, who after seducing one of the khagan's wives, fled to Byzantium.⁹⁵ According to John of Ephesus (who claimed that the siege lasted two years), once they took the city, the Avars brought provisions inside, to feed the famished residents and one year later, the city was destroyed by fire. Refugees from Sirmium went to other parts of the Balkans, e.g. to Salona or Thessalonica).⁹⁶

The occupation of Sirmium was the final stage of the Avar settlement in Pannonia and the conquest of all the territories controlled by the Gepids before 567.⁹⁷ It is important to note that, after the fall of Sirmium, the Avars made no further territorial demands, even though they conducted attacks on Byzantine territories and occupied cities before withdrawing. Their purpose with all of that was to obtain a larger annual tribute from the Byzantines.⁹⁸ After the death of Tiberius and Baian in 582, the conflict escalation was inevitable as both Maurice, who succeeded Tiberius, and the new khagan, who followed Baian, were not in favor of a peaceful solution of disputes.⁹⁹

94 See Koder 2018, 733–740, with older literature. Except for that inscription, there are no other finds attributed to the three-year siege of Sirmium by the Avars. See Popović 1975, 464; Pohl 1988a, 75.

95 Menander, *History*, fr. 27. 3, 240 (ibidem, 286, n. 320–321); Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, E 12, 580–582; John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, XXXII, 256, who states that Sirmium was surrendered by praefectum praetorii Callisterus: ... rex alium quendam cui nomen Callisterus praefectum praetorii ad ipsos Avars mittere coactus est, qui itinere facto urbem illam eis tradidit; Kollautz 1968, 138; idem 1980, 479–480; Pohl 1988a, 75; Synelli 1989, 242; Ziemann 2007, 107–108; Građanin 2009, 15; Liebeschuetz 2015, 443. For the Bookolabra's affaire see also Pohl 2003, 587.

96 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, XXXII–XXXIII, 256; Kollautz 1968, 138; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 245; Waldmüller 1976, 121, 190–191; Tirr 1976, 112; Pohl 1988a, 75; idem 1988b, 249.

97 Wolfram 1987, 347.

98 Pohl 1988b, 262–264.

99 Pohl 1988a, 76. On the views about the length of Baian's and his successors' rule, see Olajos 1976, 151–158.

Byzantium and the Avars from 582 until 626

2.1 Emperor Maurice and the Avars until 591

When general Maurice ascended the Byzantine throne on August 14, 582, the defense of the empire in the Balkans had weakened considerably after the fall of Sirmium. Maurice renewed the treaty of Tiberius with Baian, namely to pay an annual tribute to the Avars in the amount of 80,000 gold coins, on the occasion of an Avar embassy to Constantinople shortly after his ascension.¹ Despite that the “Avar problem” had already quite dangerous dimensions, during the first decade of his reign Maurice was not in a position to change Tiberius’s policy towards the Avars. Giving the paramount importance of the war against the Persians, he had to gain the required time in the Balkans with the lowest losses possible. On the other hand, the Avars sought to increase the annual tribute by putting pressure on the Empire with their attacks on the Balkan provinces. Maurice’s first treaty with the Avars lasted two years, from 582 until 584, when the successor of Baian requested additional presents from the emperor. Although Maurice fulfilled his wish, sending first an elephant and then a golden bed, the khagan sent back the presents, and asked for 20,000 gold coins to be added to the annual tribute.²

Maurice’s hostile attitude towards Avar claims led to renewed conflict, as in the summer of 584 the Avars attacked and occupied Singidunum, Viminacium (Kostolac) and Augustae (Ogost).³ The Avars continued their march to the southeast and reached the Black Sea, where they plundered and burned

1 Simocatta, *History*, 1, 3. 3–7, 44–45 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 24): ... they gave the barbarians glorious gifts, as if a prize for excellence, and agreed to deposit with the barbarians each year eighty thousand gold coins in the form of merchandise of silver and of embroidered cloth; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 146–148; Pohl 1988a, 76; Whitby 2004, 105; Liebeschuetz 2015, 443.

2 Simocatta, *History*, 1, 3. 8–11, 45–46; Different is the testimony of Theophanes (*Chronography*, 252–253), who dates the Avar embassy to May of 583 and, on the other hand, mentions that the khagan asked for an increase of the annual tribute from 100 to 120 thousands gold coins. Pohl 1988a, 76–77, 212, who assumes that the disdain of the khagan towards the presents of the emperor indicated simultaneously a dispute of the latter’s supremacy. Nechaeva 2014, 180, 183; Liebeschuetz 2015, 443.

3 Simocatta, *History*, 1, 3. 13–4. 4, 46–47; Popović 1975, 452, 468; Velkov 1987, 161 (in 583); Pohl 1988a, 77–78; Nagy 2009, 258; Liebeschuetz 2015, 443–444 (in 583); Curta 2016, 70–71. The attack is associated with a Latin inscription on a brick found in Viminacium, which appears

down the surroundings of Anchialos.⁴ On the other hand, Evagrius and Theophanes state that the Avars occupied Anchialos along with Singidunum and then they reached Constantinople and the Greek area, taking advantage of the absence of adequate Byzantine troops from the Balkans.⁵ The cities that the Avars attacked in 584, as well as in 585 (see below) indicate that their intention was to disrupt the Byzantine defence system along the Lower Danube and, simultaneously, to make it quite difficult for the Byzantines to operate north of the river, inside the territory of the Khaganate.⁶

The rapid advance of the Avars forced the emperor to prepare Constantinople for a potential siege and, because he lacked troops, he called up even churchmen. However, in the autumn of 584, the Avars withdrew from Anchialos to Sirmium as they feared an unexpected attack from the Western Turks. The latter may have been prompted by Maurice, who had meanwhile improved the empire's relations with them. Before to withdrew, the Avars paid eight *ken-tinaria* of gold to the Turks.⁷ At the same time, three nomadic tribes (Tarniach, Kotzageroi and Zabender), 10,000 men in total, migrated to the Avar khaganate in order to flee the Turkic dominion.⁸

In autumn of 584, before the departure of the Avars from Anchialos, Maurice sent to the khagan two envoys, the senator Elpidius and the *skribon* (later general) Comentiolus. The Byzantine envoys were instructed to ask for the withdrawal of the Avars, promising that the annual tribute would be paid regularly, but at the same time making clear the point that the emperor regarded the Avars as fugitives that had been given asylum on Byzantine territory. The embassy returned without any accomplishments to Constantinople, after Comentiolus escaped being killed at the order of the khagan only through the

very similar to that of Sirmium: *Christus Deus, Dei Filius, custodiat artifices omnes, qui hoc opus fecerunt in Domino*. See Kollautz 1970, 18.

4 Simocatta, *History*, I, 4, 4, 47; Popović 1975, 468; Pohl 1988a, 78; Simeonov 2013, 50; Liebeschuetz 2015, 444; Curta 2016, 71. On the date of the attack, see Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 148; Pohl 1988a, 360, ch. 3, 5, n. 10.

5 Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 10, 630; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 253.

6 Madgearu 2007, 264–265.

7 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, XLV–XLIX, 260; Pohl 1988a, 79–80; Kordoses 2011, 299; Curta 2016, 71.

8 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 8, 16–17, 260 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 191): At that time the Tarniach and Kotzager, who are also from the Var and Chunni, fled from the Turks and, on reaching Europe, united with the followers of the Avar Chagan. It is said that the Zabender also originated from the race of the Var and Chunni. The additional force which accrued to the Avars was accurately assessed at ten thousand; Avenarius 1974, 124, 152 (in 598); Czeglédý 1983, 108; Pohl 1988a, 29, 80; idem 2003, 578 (in 583/84); Curta 2006a, 62 (in 583/84); Golden 2011a, 107; see also Ziemann 2007, 102, 104 and Golden 2011b, 140, with the hypothesis that the Kotzageroi were Kutrigurs.

intervention of higher Avar officials.⁹ Elpidius, however, reached *Avaria* in the spring of the following year (585), and then returned to Constantinople along with Targitius. The goal of this double embassy was to define the terms of a new Byzantine-Avar treaty, which acknowledged the increase of the annual tribute to 100,000 gold coins. The treaty remained valid only for a few months, until the summer of that same year.¹⁰

The short-lived peace of 585 did not allow the Byzantines to reorganize their Balkan army, for, apart from the Avares, they also faced Slavic raids. The largest one took place in the summer of 585, when Slavic warriors under the leadership of a chieftain named Ardagast, reached the outskirts of Constantinople, before being defeated in Adrianople by general Comentiolus. According to Alexandru Madgearu, the Slavs of Ardagast came from the lands along the river Helibacia (presumably Ialomița, which flows into the Danube from the north, opposite to Dorostolon) and had crossed the Danube frontier either at Dorostolon or Carsium.¹¹ Furthermore, Madgearu points out that the Slavic attacks on the Balkans between 576 and 586 caused serious damage and partial depopulation as indicated by the archaeological record. Several Byzantine fortresses were destroyed, such as that next to the mouth of the Slatinska reka in the Iron Gates sector of the Danube (575/76), Oescus/Gigen (586), Sucidava/Celei (586), Halmyris/Murighiol (577/78), Axiopolis/Cernavodă (where a hoard was found with coins of Tiberius), Capidava (where no coins have been found that were struck between 578 and 587/88), Troesmis/Igrița (c. 577/78) and Beroe/Stara Zagora (c. 575/76). The Romanian scholar dates the first stage of collapse of the Byzantine frontier along the Danube between 576 and 586 with the greatest damage to be done in the western part of that frontier.¹² According also to Miloje Vasić, the fortifications on the border of Moesia I were all devastated by the Avar attack of 584.¹³ On the other hand, the invasions that followed the fall of Sirmium in 582 did not have any particular effect on Scythia Minor. Catastrophes are evident only in Tropaeum Traiani/Adamclisi (587/88)

9 Simocatta, *History*, I, 4, 6–6. 3, 47–51; Pohl 1988a, 81–82; Madgearu 1996, 43.

10 Simocatta, *History*, I, 6, 4–6, 51–52; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 253; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 148 (in 584); Pohl 1988a, 82; Madgearu 1996, 43; Curta 2001a, 96; Whitby 2004, 105; Ziemann 2007, 107; Nechaeva 2014, 84 (in 584); Liebeschuetz 2015, 444 (in 584).

11 Simocatta, *History*, I, 7, 52–53; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 254; Comșa 1974, 75, who considers the river Ialomița as the limit of rule between the chieftains Ardagast and Mousocius; Avenarius 1974, 94–95 (in 584); Pohl 1988a, 82–84; Madgearu 1996, 42–43, 48; idem 1997, 318 (in 586); Curta 2001a, 95–96; idem 2016, 82; Ziemann 2007, 107; Liebeschuetz 2015, 444.

12 Madgearu 1997, 317–319; idem 2007, 266; see also Curta 2001a, 163.

13 Vasić 1994–1995, 52.

and possibly in Sucidava, with no similar evidence for the coastal cities.¹⁴ A part of the residents of Dorostolon fled to Ancona of Italy, taking with them the relics of the local martyr Dasius. The transfer of the relics is mentioned in an inscription on a sarcophagus found in the Church of Saints Pellegrin and Theresia of Ancona: *Ἐνταῦθα κατακεῖται ὁ ἅγιος μάρτυς Δάσιος ἐνεχθεὶς ἀπὸ Δωροστόλου*.¹⁵

The new crisis in Byzantine-Avar relations, which led to a renewal of hostilities, was caused primarily by the Byzantines offering asylum to Bookolabras. In the summer of 585, Targitius came to Constantinople to collect the annual tribute and asked Maurice for the surrender of the Avar priest. But the emperor, instead of surrendering him, threw Targitius into prison for six months on the island of Chalcitis, in the Sea of Marmara.¹⁶ Targitius's arrest was in turn used as pretext for the Avar attack in autumn 585, during which the Avars rapidly occupied one after the other Ratiaria/Archar, Bononia/Vidin, Aquis/Prahovo, Dorostolon/Silistra, Zaldapa/Abrit, Panassa on the river Panysus (now Kamchiia), Marcianopolis/Devnia and Tropaeum Traiani/Adamclisi.¹⁷

To meet the Avar attacks, Maurice ordered Comentiolus to lead the troops in the Balkans. The Byzantine forces gathered in Anchialos were divided between Comentiolus and the brigadiers Castus and Martinus and attacked the Avars in the spring of 586. The Avars may have wintered in the environs of Tomis/Constanța, before separating into smaller forces. Castus moved to Zaldapa and surprised a section of Avar troops. Close to Tomis, Martinus lured the Avars under the command of the khagan into an ambush, and defeated them, but the khagan managed to escape.¹⁸

The Byzantine army returned temporarily to Marcianopolis, where Comentiolus was meanwhile stationed, and then moved to protect one of the most important passes across the Haemus, at Savoulente Kanalion. Castus, although

14 Dimitrov 1997, 28, who believes that those invasions may have caused the destruction of the forts Palmatis, Adina and Tilikion; Zahariade 2007, 34; Born 2012, 119.

15 *Martyrium*, 12–16, 44, 51–53; Beševliev 1981, 59; Angelova and Buchvarov 2007, 64.

16 Simocatta, *History*, I, 8. 2–9, 53–54; Pohl 1988a, 84–85; idem 2003, 587; Nechaeva 2014, 64; Liebeschuetz 2015, 444.

17 Simocatta, *History*, I, 8. 10, 54–55 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 31): The Chagan's men ravaged all the environs of Scythia and Mysia, and captured many cities, Rateria, Bononia, Aquis, Dorostolon, Zaldapa, Pannasa, Marcianopolis, and Tropaion; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 257; Beševliev 1969, 485–486; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 246–248; Avenarius 1974, 96 (in 584); Velkov 1987, 161 (in 586); Pohl 1988a, 85; Madgearu 1996, 43; Ziemann 2007, 108; Angelova and Buchvarov 2007, 63; Nagy 2009, 258; Liebeschuetz 2015, 444 (in 586); Curta 2016, 71.

18 Simocatta, *History*, II, 10. 9–13, 90–91; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 257; Beševliev 1969, 492; Schreiner 1986, 66 (in 587); Pohl 1988a, 85–86; Madgearu 1996, 44; Ziemann 2007, 108–109; Liebeschuetz 2015, 445 (in 587).

having defeated the Avar van-guard at Panysus, was lured into an ambush while pursuing the Avars, trapped in woods, and captured. The Avars bypassed Comentiolus' forces, following a coastal road south of Odessos/Varna, and crossed the Haemus range through unguarded passes north of Mesembria/Nesebar. Despite the annihilation of 500 Byzantines outside the city, no mention is made of the actual city being taken. The army of the Byzantine brigadier Ansimuth, who was stationed in the area, fled to Constantinople, but he was captured together with his rearguard in an ambush.¹⁹

Comentiolus called a war council, and decided to withdraw, along with Martinus, from Savoulente Kanalion to the south. During his march, he observed that the khagan was already in Thrace, and that the Avars had dispersed for plunder. Comentiolus therefore attempted to take the Avars by surprise. However, the confusion caused in the Byzantine ranks allowed the khagan to escape, despite heavy losses among the Avars.²⁰ After that, the Avars occupied Appiaria on the Danube, close to modern city of Ruse, employed war engines. The latter helped the Avars occupy even more cities that are not named by Simocatta. Advancing into the lands south of Haemus, the Avars met strong resistance in Beroe/Stara Zagora, and were forced to withdraw. Their retreat also ended their attacks on Diocletianopolis/Hisariia, Philippopolis/Plovdiv, and Adrianople/Edirne.²¹ Those may well be the circumstances under which the city of Tiberiopolis/Strumica was also destroyed, as indicated much later by Theophylact of Ohrid.²²

The failure of the Byzantine operations, particularly the capture by Avars of both Castus and Ansimuth, caused reactions against the emperor in Constantinople. To calm the city mobs, Maurice ransomed Castus and proceeded to change the leadership of the army, replacing Comentiolus with the general John Mystakon, who had distinguished himself on the Persian front. To help Mystakon, the emperor also appointed a man of Lombard origin, the major-general Drokton. Shortly after that Mystakon and Drokton defeated the Avars in Adrianople, and forced them to retreat. Simocatta has no information about

19 Simocatta, *History*, II, 11. 3–12. 8, 91–94; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 257–258; Beševliev 1969, 486–489, 492 (in 587); Pohl 1988a, 86; Whitby 2004, 105; Ziemann 2007, 109; Curta 2016, 71.

20 Simocatta, *History*, II, 12. 10–15. 12, 94–101; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 258; Pohl 1988a, 87; Ziemann 2007, 109.

21 Simocatta, *History*, II, 15. 13–17. 4, 101–103; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 259; Beševliev 1969, 489; Velkov 1987, 162 (in 587); Pohl 1988a, 87–88 (in 585); Ziemann 2007, 109; Liebeschuetz 2015, 445; Curta 2016, 71. For the Avar siege engines see below, ch. 6.6.

22 Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Martyrs*, 27, 62. See also Waldmüller 1976, 135.

the events of the following five years (586–591), and nothing else on the Avars.²³ At this time, however, the Slavs continued their attacks on the Balkans. The *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, a late and quite controversial source, records raids and the settlement of Avars in the Peloponnesus, which purportedly remained under their rule for 218 years (588–806). However, the author of the *Chronicle* likely confuses the Avars with the Slavs. At any rate, the archaeological record does not confirm any large-scale, much less long-term occupation by Avars of the Peloponnesus or of any other areas in Greece, despite repeated claims to the contrary made by some scholars.²⁴

The first siege of Thessalonica was a particularly important event in this context. The event was dated to September 586 (or 597, according to others), and the attackers were both Avars and Slavic tribes that were subject to them. The khagan is said to have put Thessalonica under siege to retaliate against Emperor Maurice's rejection of his demands. According to the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius*, he moved a large army of 100,000 men, including war engines, under the city walls. The city was spared because of the miraculous intervention of St. Demetrius, who forced the invaders to lift the siege and to withdraw. Although the joint operation of Avars and Slavs failed due to the strong fortifications of Thessalonica, the sudden appearance of such a number of attackers as far south as Macedonia suggests that the Empire was militarily weak in the Balkans, no doubt because of the continuing war against the Persians.²⁵

2.2 The Byzantine Counter-Attack in the Balkans. The First Phase of the Operations (592–594)

The second part of Maurice's reign (592–602) witnessed continuous efforts on the part of the emperor to contain the Avar and Slavic invasions and to push them back into the lands north of the Danube. Unlike his predecessors, who did not undertake systematic campaigns against the Avars and Slavs, after 591

23 Simocatta, *History*, II, 17. 5–13, 103–105; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 259; Avenarius 1974, 96 (in 585); Pohl 1988a, 88–89; Ziemann 2007, 109–110; Liebeschuetz 2015, 445.

24 See Popović 1975, 454–457, 471–475; Turlej 2001; Ziemann 2007, 110–113; Lambropoulou 2009, 197–217; Katsougiannopoulou 2009, 219–231.

25 *Miracles* I (116–165), 133–158; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 249; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 172–173 (in 597); Avenarius 1973, 18; idem 1974, 98; Waldmüller 1976, 172–174; Popović 1975, 451, 463; idem 1980, 244–245, 254; Vryonis 1981, 381, 389; Pohl 1988a, 102–106, who associates the unknown khagan's demands (*Miracles* I (117), 134) with the embassy of Targitius in 585 and, further, with the operations of 585/86; Luttwak 2009, 369 (in 597); Nagy 2009, 260 (in 597); Graff 2016, 143–144 (in 586). On the siege's date see Pohl 1988a, 370, ch. 4. 3, n. 20; Curta 2001a, 97–98; Ziemann 2007, 114–115.

Maurice followed an aggressive policy to restore the Byzantine rule in the central and northern parts of the Balkans. The end of the twenty-year war with the Persians (autumn 591)²⁶ allowed Maurice to transfer the necessary troops from Constantinople through Heraclea and Adrianople to Anchialos in order to conduct military operations against the Avars and the Slavs. The ten-year long Byzantine counter-attack is described in detail by Theophylact Simocatta, but his account presents several problems of chronology, however wider accepted is the outbreak of the war to the spring of 592.²⁷

Chronological problems are linked to a Frankish embassy that, according to Simocatta, arrived in Constantinople at the beginning of Maurice's first campaign. A Persian embassy arrived at that same time, which forced the emperor to return from Anchialos to the capital. According to Simocatta, the Frankish envoys Bosus and Betus had been sent by king (of Burgundy) Theuderich II (596–613).²⁸ However, that king succeeded Childebert II (575–596) in the spring of 596.²⁹ Therefore, either the envoys had been sent by Childebert II in 592 (or 590),³⁰ or by Theudebert II of Austrasia (596–612) in 596,³¹ in both cases to announce an accession of a new king to the Frankish throne, and to propose cooperation against the Avars. Some believe that Simocatta conflated two³² or even three³³ different Frankish embassies. Along with those events, Simocatta refers to the three Slavs “from the western Ocean” being taken captives by the Byzantines, an episode that most scholars now regard as having a mythical background.³⁴ Be as it may, much like in 586, Anchialos served in 592 as the basis of operations against the Avars. The reason is quite simple: Anchialos was

26 Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 155, 194; Schreiner 1985, 196–197; Dignas and Winter 2007, 43.

27 Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 160; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 249; Avenarius 1974, 102–103, 219 (in 591); Schreiner 1985, 197; Pohl 1988a, 129, 131.

28 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 3, 5–8, 225; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 269.

29 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV, 16, 172–174: Quarto anno, post quod Childebertus regnum Gunthramni acciperat, defunctus est; regnumque eius filii sui Teudebertus et Teudericus adsumunt. Teudebertus sortitus est Auster, sedem habens Mittensem; Teudericus accipit regnum Gunthramni in Burgundia, sedem habens Aurilanes; (ibidem, 173, n. 70); Geary 1996, 154.

30 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 227 (in 592); Schreiner 1985, 195–200 (in 590?); Drauschke 2011, 261 (in 590).

31 Lounghis 1980, 104 (in 598); Fritze 1982, 94; idem 1994, 79 (in 595–597); Bertels 1987, 94; Christou 1991, 153.

32 Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 154–155 (592 and 602); Pohl 1988a, 131–132 (592 and 596).

33 Schreiner 1985, 198–200 (590, 596 and 602). See also, Drauschke 2011, 256–257.

34 See mostly Curta 2001a, 99 (n. 80), 327; Wołoszyn 2014.

the most important harbour in northern Thrace, and thus secured the fastest and easiest supply sealine for the Byzantine army.³⁵

After the departure of the Frankish delegation, Maurice did not return to Anchialos, but instead appointed Priscus as general of Europe. The khagan did not initially turn directly against the Byzantines, but instead ordered subject Slavic tribes to attack the lands south of the Danube. The Slavic attack of 592 targeted Singidunum, but the Byzantines successfully defended the city, and managed to destroy the Slavic fleet on the river Sava. The khagan withdrew the Slavs from the siege of Singidunum, receiving in return 2,000 gold coins, a gilded table, and one garment.³⁶

The Avars, who were concentrated at Sirmium, crossed the Sava and advanced into the Byzantine territory up to Bononia. To prevent the Avars cross the Haemus range, Priscus appointed a garrison, under Salvianus, to the mountain pass of Prokliana, which secured access from Marcianopolis to Anchialos. Salvianus repelled the Avar van-guard, and then the attack of 8,000 Avars under Samur. Four days later, and while the Byzantines had left the pass, the Avars crossed the Haemus and approached Anchialos. From there they continued their march up to Drizipera (now Büyükkarıştıran, near Lüleburgaz), about 150 klm to the west from Constantinople. After the unsuccessful siege of Drizipera, the Avars moved to Heraclea (now Marmara Ereğlisi).³⁷ The counter-attack of Priscus ended in failure, as the Avars took him by surprise with a midnight raid on the Byzantine cavalry, which was defeated and had to withdraw to Tzouroulos/Çorlu. In response, Maurice wrote a misleading letter that was intended to fall into the hands of the Avars. In that letter, Maurice commanded Priscus to send the fleet on the Danube to attack Pannonia. The trick forced the khagan to retreat, and after he obtained a few gifts and a small amount of gold, he concluded a new treaty with Byzantium.³⁸

After the departure of the khagan, no mention is made of hostilities until 595. Maurice took advantage of the peace to turn against the Slavs on the Lower Danube, who continued their attacks on the Balkan provinces. In the

35 Simeonov 2013, 50.

36 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 3. 9–4. 3, 225–226; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 161–162; Avenarius 1974, 103 (in 596); Pohl 1988a, 133; Bóna 2000, 169; Liebeschuetz 2015, 445–446.

37 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 4. 4–5. 8, 226–228; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 269–270; Avenarius 1974, 103–104 (in 596); Pohl 1988a, 133–134; Madgearu 1996, 47–48 (in 593); Ziemann 2007, 116; Liebeschuetz 2015, 446; Curta 2016, 72.

38 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 5. 8–16, 228–230; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 270; *Strategikon*, IX. 2, 306; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 162; Avenarius 1974, 104; Pohl 1988a, 135; Liebeschuetz 2015, 446–447.

spring of 593,³⁹ Priscus concentrated powerful forces in Heraclea for a campaign against the Slavs, who lived in what is now southern Romania. After a long march northwards, he reached Dorostolon, the basis of Byzantine operations in the eastern part of the Lower Danube region.⁴⁰ Before his attack, he received the Avar envoy Kokh, who inquired about the purpose of the campaign, and reminded the Byzantines of the treaty upon which they had just agreed. After he assured Kokh that the campaign was directed against the Slavs, the Byzantine general crossed the Danube and attacked the chieftains Ardagast and Mousocius. Although successful, his troops were on the brink of mutiny when receiving the order of the emperor to spend the winter in the lands north of the river. Priscus was therefore forced to put a stop on the campaign.⁴¹

The next year (594), while Priscus was south of the Danube, the Avars sent another embassy to inquire about his movements. The Byzantine general was not capable to reassure the Avars of his good intentions, and the khagan therefore ordered subject Slavic tribes to enter the Byzantine territory. As is apparent from Simocatta's account, the khagan was worried about the successes Priscus had against the Slavs, for he apparently was facing at that same time some domestic problems inside *Avaria*. Part of the higher officials, with Targitius at their head, had no desire to wage war against Byzantium.⁴² Simocatta's testimony shows that the khagan's hostile attitude towards the Byzantine Empire was not shared by all Avars. Targitius, an experienced envoy, was a prominent figure in the Avar khaganate⁴³ and probably one of the "most powerful" who had prevented the execution of the Byzantine envoy Comeniolus in 584.⁴⁴ He seemed to have favored peaceful relations with Byzantium,

39 Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 163; Avenarius 1974, 104 (spring of 597); Velkov 1987, 162 (in 594); Pohl 1988a, 136; Madgearu 1996, 48 (in 594).

40 The city belonged to the province of Moesia II, although its political history related more to the province of Scythia Minor during the Late Antiquity. See Angelova and Buchvarov 2007, 61, 63.

41 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 6. 2–10. 3, 230–239; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 270–272; Kollautz 1968, 140; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 163–164; Avenarius 1974, 104–105 (in 596/97); Pohl 1988a, 136–138; Curta 2001a, 100–103; idem 2016, 82, 86–87; Ziemann 2007, 116; Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 369.

42 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 11. 4–6, 242; Pohl 1988a, 139.

43 Simocatta, *History*, I, 6. 5, 51–52 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 28): The Chagan adopted the proposal and sent Targitius, a respected man in the tribe of the Avars, ... Pohl 1988a, 186–187; Nechaeva 2014, 129.

44 Simocatta, *History*, I, 6. 3, 51 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 28): ... and the most powerful of the Avars soothed their leader with persuasive arguments, gradually persuading him not to pronounce the death-penalty against Comeniolus, ... See also above, n. 9.

in sharp contrast to another group of officials, who incited the khagan to wage war constantly.⁴⁵

Although one cannot fathom the existence of a philobyzantine “party” within the Khaganate, there is no reason to doubt the existence of rival aristocratic factions inside *Avaria*, especially after the fall of Sirmium in 582. Their main difference seems to have concerned the choice between maintaining the already conquered lands (as the Avars had occupied all the former territories of the Gepids and the Lombards), and waging war against Byzantium in order to increase the annual tribute that the Avars received from the Empire. It remains unknown whether Targitius’ disagreement with the khagan in 594 led to his removal from power as he is not mentioned to in any later embassies. He may, however, have been an old man, since his first embassy dates back to the beginning of Justin II’s reign in 565.

In an attempt to assuage the khagan, Priscus sent an envoy named Theodore, to whom Simocatta attributes a speech hinting at the arrogance of the khagan by way of a comparison with the Egyptian pharaoh Sesostri III (1878–1839 BC). Nonetheless, ready to compromise, the khagan asked part of the booty that the Byzantines had taken during the last operations against the Slavs be given to him, for he believed that Priscus had entered a territory under Avar jurisdiction, and had waged war against subjects of the khagan. Without any further consideration of the Avar claims, Priscus agreed to release 5,000 prisoners of war, an initiative that caused indignation among his soldiers. As Walter Pohl points out, Priscus’ gesture was a major diplomatic victory for the Avars, for the Byzantine general indirectly recognized that the Slavic area north of the Lower Danube was within the sphere of the khagan’s influence. In other words, Priscus’ belied his own words to Kokh, according to which the Byzantine campaign north of the river had not concerned the Byzantine-Avar treaty. Furthermore, his gesture meant that whenever the Byzantines would renew the war against the Slavs, the khagan could make a similar claim on the basis of the principle now acknowledged by Priscus, namely that he (the khagan) was the legal ruler of the Lower Danube Slavs.⁴⁶ The Austrian scholar notes that the distribution

45 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 2, 224: The envoy, who was the major advocate continually urging war with the Romans, ... See also above, ch. 1.4, n. 89.

46 Simocatta, *History*, VI, 11. 7–21, 242–245; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 273–274; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 164–165; Avenarius 1974, 106 (spring of 598); Chrysos 1987, 34; Velkov 1987, 162 (in 596); Pohl 1988a, 139–141; Shlosser 1994, 105; Curta 2001a, 103; Ziemann 2007, 116–117; Nechaeva 2014, 125; On the philologic motif of the *changeable life* and Sesostri, see Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 369–370, considering the speech of Theodore as “a demonstration of Roman power”. See also *ibidem*, for Sesostri in the literary culture of Antiquity.

of the booty had a prestige character for the khagan. On the other hand, Florin Curta believes that the Avar claims were justified in the light of the nomadic perception of space: the Avars regarded the Danube as the boundary between the lands of the enemy, which were not under the authority of khagan, and in their own territory (the “zone of peace”), which included the Slavs of the Lower Danube region.⁴⁷

Dissatisfied with Priscus’ decisions, Maurice replaced him with Peter, who was the brother of the emperor. Peter set camp in Odessos/Varna, and began preparations for the new attack against the Slavs. However, the Byzantine soldiers seem to have become quite apprehensive about fighting again in the lands north of the Danube. This was partially due to Maurice’s decision to pay only a third of their salaries in cash, while supplying the remaining part in military equipment and clothing. The protests of the soldiers subsided only when promised that the state would take care of those who could no longer fight and that the sons of those killed in war would replace their fathers in the army.⁴⁸

At the end of those turbulences, Peter moved against the Slavs. The Byzantines, following the road from Odessos to Marcianopolis, met Slavic contingents that had plundered Zaldapa, Scopis (perhaps Gelendzhik, between Odessos and Dorostolon), and Aquis. The Byzantine attack against the Slavs was successful, but the next day Peter was injured while hunting.⁴⁹ Maurice asked for more operations, as well as the protection of Thrace against Slavic attacks. Peter moved northward and passed by the forts Pistus, Zaldapa, and Iatrus before reaching Novae/Svishtov on the Danube, where he celebrated the feast of the martyr Lupus together with the town’s inhabitants. Then, in August 594, he moved to Asemus. Peter’s stop in Asemus was short, for he angered the local residents and bishop when trying to take with him the town’s garrison. Peter moved ahead, followed by the curses that the inhabitants of Asemus were throwing at him from the height of the walls.⁵⁰

47 See Pohl 1988a, 117; Curta 2001a, 207–208.

48 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 1, 245–247; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 274; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 166; Schreiner 1986, 66; idem 1994, 26; Pohl 1988a, 141; Shlosser 1994, 94, 99–100; Whitby 2004, 100; Ziemann 2007, 117–118.

49 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 2, 1–12, 247–248; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 274; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 166; Velkov 1987, 162; Pohl 1988a, 141–142; Curta 2001a, 103; idem 2016, 83; Ziemann 2007, 118; Liebeschuetz 2015, 448–449.

50 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 2, 13–3, 10, 248–251; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 274–275, who confuses Asemus with Novae; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 166–167; Velkov 1987, 162; Pohl 1988a, 142, 209 and Sarantis 2013a, 43, who assume that the episode in Asemus indicates the weakness of imperial rule in the Balkan provinces; Shlosser 1994, 94–95 (in 596); Curta 2001a, 104; Ziemann 2007, 118; Liebeschuetz 2015, 439, 449.

In September 594, the Byzantine treaty with the Avars was further compromised. A part of the Byzantine army under Peter's command clashed on the southern bank of the Lower Danube with Bulgar troops operating on behalf of the Avars. When the envoys of the khagan showed up, Peter claimed that he knew nothing about the incident, and he offered presents and a sum of money to assuage Avar dissatisfaction.⁵¹ Having thus overcome that temporary crisis, the Byzantines moved against the Slav chieftain Peiragast. Although the Slavs captured the Byzantine scouts and slaughtered the van-guard of the Byzantine army, Peter eventually surprised the army of Peiragast, who lost his life in the battle. However, during their march across the lands north of the river Danube the Byzantines, suffering from lack of water, were ambushed by the Slavs near the river Helibacia and lost a great number of their men. That defeat showed that the strength of the Slavs remained considerable and resulted in the replacement of Peter by Priscus to the command of the troops in Europe.⁵² Much like Priscus in 593, Peter's 594 campaign against the Slavs north of the Lower Danube may be regarded as preemptive strikes and "punitive raids", without any long-term effect.⁵³

2.3 The Second Phase of the Operations (595–598)

In the spring of 595, the Avars broke the peace treaty with Byzantium and invaded the Northwestern Balkans. The pretext for the attack was Priscus' crossing of the Danube at the Upper Novae (Česava), and his operations in the lands on the north bank of the river. Priscus' argument that the area was rich in water and suitable for hunting did not persuade the khagan, who accused the Byzantines of entering a territory that was not theirs. In reply, Priscus defended the rights of the empire to the region and reminded the Avars that they were runaways from the Turkic dominion.⁵⁴

51 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 4. 1–7, 251–252; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 275; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 167; Velkov 1987, 162; Pohl 1988a, 142, 228; Ziemann 2007, 118–119; Liebeschuetz 2015, 449–450; Nikolov 2017, 67 (in 597).

52 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 4. 8–5. 10, 252–254; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 275–276; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 250; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 167–168; Avenarius 1974, 106; Pohl 1988a, 143; Madgearu 1996, 49 (autumn 595); Curta 2001a, 104–105; Ziemann 2007, 119; Liebeschuetz 2015, 450.

53 Liebeschuetz 2015, 450–451.

54 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 7. 1–5, 256; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 276; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 169–170; Avenarius 1974, 106 (spring of 599); Schreiner 1986, 67; Chrysos 1987, 34; Pohl 1988a, 144; Curta 2006a, 67; Ziemann 2007, 119; Liebeschuetz 2015, 451–452.

Ten days later, the Byzantines were informed that the Avars had entered Singidunum, destroyed its walls and attempted to move away its population.⁵⁵ Priscus moved to Singidunum and, after he encamped on a Danubian island named Singa, he entered negotiations with the Avars while ready to start the war. The khagan disputed the right of the Byzantines to rule on the Danube and demanded that they withdraw immediately from the area. When Priscus asked for the return of Singidunum to the Byzantines, the khagan replied that he would continue to wage war and to occupy more cities.⁵⁶ With no room left for compromise, Priscus sent his troops by ships to Singidunum under the brigadier Godwin, who retook the city and restored its fortifications. As Anna Kotłowska and Łukasz Różycki point out, “all Roman actions prior to 595 AD show their desire to restore the *limes* based on the existing and populated border fortifications.” However, their argument that “Priscus intervened on Singidunum’s behalf although the city was located beyond the Roman sphere of influence” does not take into account that the Byzantines regarded the Danube as the northern frontier of the Empire.⁵⁷

After the recapture of Singidunum, the khagan announced to Priscus that the treaty was now invalid, and turned to Dalmatia, where he occupied Bonkeis (the elocation of which is unknown) and forty other Byzantine forts.⁵⁸ Priscus did not move against the Avars, but he sent Godwin with a contingent of 2,000 men to follow their march. The Byzantine contingent managed to destroy in the mountain passes the Avar troops carrying loot, which was promptly delivered to Priscus.⁵⁹ According to Simocatta, the operations in Dalmatia were

55 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 10. 1, 262; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 276; Kollautz 1968, 140–142; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 1, 250 (in 596); Waldmüller 1976, 153; Vryonis 1981, 389; Fine 1983, 32 (in 596); Pohl 1988a, 145, 192; Bóna 2000, 169; Liebeschuetz 2015, 452.

56 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 10. 2–11. 6, 262–264; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 276–277; Kollautz 1968, 140–142 (in 596); Popović 1975, 477; Pohl 1988a, 144–146, 208; Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 370–371.

57 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 11. 6–8, 264–265; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 277; Kollautz 1968, 142; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 170; Avenarius 1974, 106; Popović 1975, 476–477 (in 596); Velkov 1987, 162 (in 598); Pohl 1988a, 146; Madgearu 1996, 50 (in 596); Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 371.

58 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 11. 9–12. 1, 265; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 277; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 170; Popović 1975, 486 (in 597); Waldmüller 1976, 154; Fine 1983, 32 (in 597); Pohl 1988a, 125, 146; Dzino 2010, 88, 97 (in 597); Liebeschuetz 2015, 452.

59 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 12. 2–8, 265–266; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 277–278; Beševliev 1969, 483; Pohl 1988a, 146–147, who locates the space of the operations in the mountain passes between Sirmium and Salona; Nikolov 2017, 67–68 (in 598).

followed by one-and-a-half-year lull in hostilities, namely from the autumn of 595 to the spring of 597.⁶⁰

The temporary suspension of operations against Byzantium gave the khagan the breathing space to intervene in the conflict between Slavs and Bavarians in order to strengthen his position on the western borders of the Khaganate. Scholars often refer to those Slavic tribes of eastern Tyrol and Carinthia (the *Sclaborum provincia* of Paul the Deacon) as Alpine Slavs (*Alpenslawen*). Their gradual settlement is dated in the late sixth century, covering mostly the valleys of the rivers Drava, Sava, Mura, Enns, Savinja, and Soča (Isonzo).⁶¹ Shortly after their settlement, those Slavs came in conflict with the Bavarians in the Upper Drava valley in 592.⁶² On the other hand, the Slavic groups in modern Slovenia (between Pannonia and the Friulian plain) belonged to the westernmost part of the Avar khaganate.⁶³

In 595, the Avars turned against their western neighbours, the Bavarians, and managed to defeat them. The pretext for the attack was the demand for help from the Slavic tribes of Carinthia (in modern Austria) and Krajina, in the valley of the Upper Drava, after the defeat that they had suffered at the hands of the Bavarian duke Tassilo I. The Avars thus put under their control the Slavic settlements of the Eastern Alps (namely an Avar “protectorate”), with the exception of a small part that passed to the Byzantine Istria and the Lombard Duchy of Friuli, respectively.⁶⁴ The following year (596), the Avars raided Thuringia and the Frankish queen Brunhilde had to pay them to withdraw.⁶⁵ Those were

60 Simocatta, *History*, vii, 12, 9, 266 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 195): accordingly, for eighteen months and more nothing worthy of record was accomplished by the Romans and barbarians encamped on the Ister; Kollautz 1968, 145 (autumn of 598); Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 1, 254; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 171; Avenarius 1974, 106, 221 (spring 599–autumn 600); Pohl 1988a, 147; Madgearu 1996, 50 (spring 596–autumn 597); Ziemann 2007, 119; Liebeschuetz 2015, 452–453 (autumn 595–summer 597).

61 Štih 2010, 54, 100, 112–114.

62 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* iv, 7, 118: His diebus Tassilo a Childeperto rege Francorum apud Baioariam rex ordinatus est. Qui mox cum exercitu in Sclaborum provinciam introiens, patrata victoria, ad solum proprium cum maxima praeda remeavit; Bertels 1987, 92–95; Pohl 1988a, 132, 149; Curta 2001a, 99; Štih 2010, 54, 112 (in 593).

63 Štih 2010, 149, 152.

64 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, iv, 10, 120: Isdem ipsis diebus Baioarii usque ad duo milia virorum dum super Sclavos inruunt, superveniente cacano omnes interficiuntur; Kollautz 1965b, 634; Avenarius 1974, 117–118; Fritze 1982, 64, 70, 90–91; Wolfram 1985, 128; Pohl 1988a, 151–152; Krahwinkler 1992, 38; Curta 2001a, 99, n. 80; Štih 2010, 101, 112.

65 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, iv, 11, 120; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 171; Avenarius 1974, 58, 119 (in 595); Fritze 1982, 90; idem 1994, 76; Pohl 1988a, 120, 150–151; Schimpff 2007, 401.

probably the circumstances under which an embassy from the Franks came to Constantinople in 596 to propose to Maurice an alliance against Avars.⁶⁶

Between 595 and 597, the Avars turned their attention to the West, and because of that the Byzantines had the necessary time to reorganize their forces in the Balkans. However, even they had any treaty with the Avars, they did not attack on them. The lack of aggressive initiatives against either the Avars or the Slavs, confirms the weakness that the Byzantine army had shown ever since the beginning of Maurice's Balkan campaigns. After the first clash between the Byzantines and the Avars in 592, which resulted in the defeat of the Byzantines, as well as the counter-attack that followed in Tzouroulos, the tactic of Maurice's relations with the khagan was more defensive than aggressive in character. That only changed during the last phase of the operations from 599 until 602. Even after the recapture of Singidunum in 595, the Byzantines tried to avoid any direct confrontation with the Avars.

The successful outcome of the campaign in the West allowed the Avars to turn against the Byzantines in the autumn of 597. Choosing as the battlefield the Eastern Balkans, they followed the road along the Danube and reached the outskirts of Tomis. Priscus rallied his troops from Singidunum to help the city and remained in its hinterland during the winter. In spring of 598 the two opponents were still in the area, watching each others' expected movements. Since Scythia Minor could no longer provide the supplies for large armies, the Byzantines suffered from lack of food. On Easter Sunday, March 30, a remarkable event took place: the khagan sent foodstuffs to the Byzantines, and Priscus asked for a five-day truce. In exchange for the foodstuffs for his troops, he sent to the khagan spices and perfumes from India.⁶⁷ From a military point of view, the action of the khagan was in sharp contrast with one of the main tactics of Avar warfare, namely to sever the opponents' supply lines.⁶⁸

After the brief respite, the khagan moved against Comentiolus (who had arrived in Nicopolis on the Danube and then headed to Iatrus), to prevent the union of his forces with Priscus. Simocatta accuses Comentiolus of high treason, for, according to him, the Byzantine general sent a secret embassy to the khagan, promising to hand over his army. Comentiolus withdrew, and his behavior, as well as the continuous changes in the disposition of the army, caused

66 See above, n. 28–33.

67 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 13, 1–7, 267–268; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 278, who states that were needed 400 carts for the transfer of the Avar supplies; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 172–175; Avenarius 1974, 106 (in 601); Velkov 1987, 162 (in 599); Pohl 1988a, 152; Madgearu 1996, 50; idem 2007, 265; Ziemann 2007, 119–120; Nechaeva 2014, 183; Liebeschuetz 2015, 453.

68 *Strategikon*, XI, 2, 362, 364; Bachrach 1984, 16; Nagy 2009, 258–259; Golden 2011a, 85, 95.

anger and confusion. The Avars took advantage of the disorganized retreat of the Byzantines and slaughtered many of their forces on the banks of the river Iatrus (Iantra). When Comentiolus reached Drizipera, the residents did not even allow him to enter the city and forced him to continue his way to Constantinople, where he arrived followed by serious charges and humiliations.⁶⁹ According to John of Antioch, Comentiolus had the backing of Emperor Maurice, who, faced with increasing discontent within the army, had ordered him to surrender his forces to the Avars. However, when his letter became known, he replaced Comentiolus for a year with Philippicus, his own relative.⁷⁰ Simocatta's testimony seems to be based on rumors that circulated in the army among those who were particularly displeased with Maurice. The emperor could not have possibly risked surrendering his troops to the enemy, against whom he was determined to continue the war, still hoping for a military success that would change the attitude of the troops towards him. On the other hand, Michael the Syrian writes about a raid of the Bulgars taking place at that time, and a victory of Philippicus against them.⁷¹

Having followed Comentiolus to his retreat, the Avars occupied Drizipera where they destroyed the church of the martyr Alexander, and plundered his grave. However, a pestilence broke out in the Avar army, which caused heavy losses and suspended their campaign. In order to strengthen his position, Comentiolus spread panic in Constantinople about the power of the Avars, and many residents desired to move to the Asian side of the capital. Maurice was preparing Constantinople for siege and simultaneously, following the advice of the Senate, sent an embassy to the Avars in Drizipera.⁷²

The khagan allowed the Byzantine envoy Harmaton to appear before him after twelve days of waiting. He initially refused the presents of the emperor,

69 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 13. 8–14. 10, 268–270; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 278–279; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 175; Velkov 1987, 162; Pohl 1988a, 153; Shlosser 1994, 111; Madgearu 1996, 50; Ziemann 2007, 120; Liebeschuetz 2015, 453–454; Curta 2016, 72.

70 John of Antioch, *History*, 106, 147; Pohl 1988a, 153–154; Shlosser 1994, 74; Ziemann 2007, 120. The testimony on the command of Maurice to surrender the army to the Avars occurs also to Theophanes (*Chronography*, 278), George the Monk (*Chronicle*, 658–659) and Zonaras (*Epitome*, 14. 13, 192).

71 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11, 10.24, 374–375: Lorsque les Bulgares se mirent à ravager le pays de Thrace, les Romains marchèrent contre eux avec Philippicus; ils vainquirent les Bulgares et revinrent. L'empereur ne les jugea pas même alors dignes de leur salaire; Ziemann 2007, 120–121.

72 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 14. 11–15. 9, 270–272; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 279; Kollautz 1968, 144 (in 596); Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 253 (in 596); Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 176; Avenarius 1974, 106; Fine 1983, 32 (in 599); Velkov 1987, 163; Pohl 1988a, 154; Whitby 2013, 444; Liebeschuetz 2015, 454.

whom he accused of violating the previous treaty. Nonetheless, the two sides concluded a new treaty, according to which “the Ister was agreed as intermedium between Romans and Avars, but there was provision for crossing the river against Sclavenes; the peace payments were also increased by an additional 20,000 gold solidi. On these precise terms the war between Romans and Avars reached a conclusion.” The Byzantine-Avar treaty of 598 increased the annual tribute to 120,000 gold coins, defined the Danube as the border between the two opponents, and gave the right to the Byzantines to cross the river for operations in the Slavic hinterland. By such conditions, the Byzantines effectively restored the Danube frontier and, moreover, acquired greater discretion in their operations against the Slavs.⁷³

Theophanes and George the Monk provide additional information on the negotiations in Drizipera. The Avars had 12,000 prisoners of war (the number is referred only by George the Monk) and requested as ransom for each one of them first one, then half a gold coin and finally four *keratia*. However, as Emperor Maurice refused to pay for them, the Avars killed the prisoners.⁷⁴ Maurice's reluctance to pay the ransom, which significantly diminished his prestige in the eyes of his soldiers and people, was another indication of the financial crisis because of constant wars and the continuing increase of the annual tribute to the Avars.

Alexandru Madgearu treats the Byzantine-Avar war of 592–598 as the second phase of the fall of the Danubian *limes*, as fortresses in the Iron Gates area and along the river Timok were sacked. Although the Byzantines defeated the Avars in Singidunum in 595, the defense system of the Moesia I and western Dacia Ripuaria (to the west from Ratiaria) collapsed in 595/96. The bridgehead at Sucidava/Celei in eastern Dacia Ripuaria was also destroyed in 597/98. Two hoards found in Taliata and in modern Bosman may point to the destruction of those respective forts in 594/95 and 595/96 respectively. In Kantabaza, the coin series stop in 592/93, and in Upper Novae in 593/94. Troesmis and Dinogetia (Scythia Minor) were also devastated, most likely by the Slavic attacks of 593, for no coins have been found that are later than 591/92. The numismatic finds also show destruction at Histria around 593/94, while Tropaeum Traiani was

73 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 15. 9–14, 272–273 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 201); Theophanes, *Chronography*, 280; Kollautz 1968, 145; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 176–177; Avenarius 1974, 106–107 (in 601); Chrysos 1987, 36; Pohl 1988a, 154–155, 207; Shlosser 1994, 138–139 (in 600); Curta 2001a, 105; Liebeschuetz 2015, 454; Kotłowska and Różycki 2016, 371–372.

74 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 280; George the Monk, *Chronicle*, 659; Kollautz 1968, 148; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 256; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 176, n. 3; Fine 1983, 32 (in 599); Pohl 1988a, 155, 196; Schreiner 1994, 26–27.

set on fire in 592 or 595.⁷⁵ According to Miloje Vasić, the khagan's claim that "the Ister is foreign to you, its swell hostile. This we have won with arms, this we have enslaved by the spear" was a direct mirror of the actual situation in Moesia I.⁷⁶ However, it should be noted that the two largest urban centers of the province, Singidunum and Viminacium, remained under Byzantine control and their occupation continued for a few years, for both cities served as the basis of the last major Byzantine counter-attack against the Avars.

2.4 The Third Phase of the Operations (599–602)

The treaty of 598, although ostensibly settling the crucial issues for both sides on the basis of mutual interest (the restoration of the frontier on the Danube for the Byzantines, and high annual tribute for the Avars), was nonetheless shortly lived. Just one year after its conclusion, in the summer of 599, Maurice violated the treaty and attacked the Avars. The emperor placed Comentiolus at the command of the troops and sent him to reinforce Priscus, who moved with his army from Singidunum to Viminacium.⁷⁷ The choice of Viminacium as the base of the attack points to the possibility of combined operations of the army and the fleet, the latter used also for securing supplies via the Danube. In fact, the port of Viminacium has been discovered by archaeologists between a channel and the mouth of the Mlava. The anchorage must have served for loading and unloading of the ships, and seems to have been built in the mid-sixth century in order to accommodate large shipments for the troops stationed in the interior of the Balkans. Such shipments were transported on large ships sailing along the Danube and then moved onto smaller ships that reach the Balkan hinterland via the Mlava.⁷⁸ To that settlement the Byzantine fleet moved for the attack of 599, under Priscus' command.⁷⁹

The Avars unsuccessfully tried to prevent Priscus' forces from crossing the Danube. The Byzantine general repelled the attack of the Avars north of Viminacium and then, after two successive victories, he pursued them in a swampy region, where he destroyed a large part of their army. The khagan withdrew to

75 Vasić 1994–1995, 52–53; Madgearu 1997, 320–322; idem 2007, 265; Curta 2001a, 163.

76 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 10, 5, 263 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 193); Chrysos 1987, 35; Vasić 1994–1995, 52.

77 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 1, 9–2, 2, 284–285; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 280; Kollautz 1968, 145–146 (spring of 600); Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 177–178; Avenarius 1974, 108 (in 601); Pohl 1988a, 156, 388 (ch. 5, 8, n. 1); Ziemann 2007, 121; Liebeschuetz 2015, 454.

78 Mirković 1999, 23–25.

79 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 2, 8, 286 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 211): On the second day he ordered the ships to leave the banks of the Ister and move their anchorage close to Viminacium.

the north and the Byzantines entered through the present-day region of the Banat into the Lower Tisza area, thus approaching the center of the Avar khaganate. There they won one more victory over the Avars.⁸⁰

According to Paul the Deacon, the Avars feared Maurice.⁸¹ However, since the Emperor did not participate in the war operations, they must have feared rather the military abilities of Priscus, who on the battlefield managed to neutralize the strategic advantages of the Avars. According to the *Strategikon*, the Byzantines had to avoid hostilities with the Avars in areas such as rivers, lakes, swamps, and all kinds of natural obstacles because of the likelihood of ambushes.⁸² With his knowledge of the terrain conditions, Priscus took advantage of them, and trapped the Avars in places from which they had no way to escape.⁸³

Despite his victories, Priscus did not continue his march towards the center of the Khaganate (the lands between the Danube and the Tisza) but instead he sent 4,000 soldiers to follow the movements of the Avars. The Byzantines attacked three Gepidic villages, killed their 30,000 residents and captured many prisoners.⁸⁴ Being in a very difficult position, the khagan mobilized a large number of Slavs and sent them against the Byzantines along with Avar, Gepidic and other “barbarian” troops. The Byzantines prevailed again in the last battle that took place on the Tisza and Priscus sent the numerous prisoners to Tomis.⁸⁵ The khagan later sent a delegation to Maurice asking for the return of those prisoners, and managed to take back the Avar soldiers.⁸⁶

80 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 2. 1–3. 10, 285–288; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 281–282; Kollautz 1968, 146, who assumes that Simocatta confuses the river Tisza with the river Timiș; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 254 (in 600); Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 179; Velkov 1987, 163 (in 601); Pohl 1988a, 156–157; Luttwak 2009, 60; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 151–155; Curta 2016, 73.

81 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV. 26, 125; ... Hunni quoque, qui et Avars appellantur, eius virtute devicti sunt; Pohl 1988a, 237.

82 *Strategikon*, XI. 2, 366.

83 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 3. 6, 287; ibidem, VIII, 3. 13–14, 289.

84 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 3. 11–13, 288; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 282; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 179; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 255; Horedt 1985, 164; idem 1987, 12; Pohl 1988a, 157–158, 230; Curta 2006a, 62; Ziemann 2007, 121; Liebeschuetz 2015, 455.

85 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 3. 13–14, 289 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 213): ... three thousand Avars were captured, a total of six thousand two hundred other barbarians, and eight thousand Slavenes; Different numbers in Theophanes' account (*Chronography*, 282/Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 407): The Romans captured alive 3.000 Avars, 800 Sklavini and 3.200 Gepids and 2.000 other barbarians; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 255; Avenarius 1974, 108; Fritze 1982, 62, 71; Pohl 1988a, 158, 216; Ziemann 2007, 121; Golden 2011a, 107; Liebeschuetz 2015, 454–455; Nikolov 2017, 68.

86 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 4. 1–2, 289; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 282; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 179; Pohl 1988a, 158; Shlosser 1994, 138; Ziemann 2007, 121; Liebeschuetz 2015, 455.

During the winter 599/600, the Byzantine army withdrew. Priscus could not advance any farther, while Comentiolus headed to Philippopolis following the road that crossed the Haemus through the so-called “pass of Trajan,” which, according to Simocatta, had not been used for 90 years. Comentiolus, who was not involved in the operations, spent the winter in Philippopolis and returned to Constantinople in the spring of 600. The retreat of Priscus to the lands south of the Danube led to the cessation of the conflict from September 600 to August 601.⁸⁷

The khagan now turned to the West and allied himself with the king of the Lombards, Agilulf (591–616). The Avar-Lombard alliance of 600 may have also included the Franks. The Lombards recognized the Avar sphere of influence in the valley of the Upper Drava and the Slavic lands east of Friuli, while the Avars recognized the Lombard rule over northern Italy.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the khagan asked for the assistance of the Lombards for the construction of a fleet, by which “he captured an island in Thrace,” an incident that remains too obscure for any attempt at identifying its exact time and place.⁸⁹

By 600, the Slavs were raiding the western Byzantine provinces. According to a letter of Pope Gregory the Great, in 599 the Byzantine exarch Callinicus repelled the Slavs who had invaded northern Istria, most likely through the Karst region.⁹⁰ In a letter to Maximus, bishop of Salona, Gregory refers to another attack in 600.⁹¹ The areas of Dalmatia and Istria were of special interest

87 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 4. 2–9, 289–290; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 281–283; Beševliev 1969, 484–485; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 179–180; Avenarius 1974, 108 (in 602); Schreiner 1986, 67–68; Velkov 1987, 163; Pohl 1988a, 158–159; Ziemann 2007, 121–122; Liebeschuetz 2015, 455.

88 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV, 24, 125; Pohl 1988a, 159; Christou 1991, 146.

89 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV, 20, 123: Hoc quoque tempore misit Agilulf rex cacano regi Avarorum artifices ad faciendas naves, cum quibus isdem cakanus insulam quandam in Thracia expugnavit; Avenarius 1974, 121 (in 602); Tirr 1976, 117; Pohl 1988a, 159. W. Pohl (op. cit., 389, ch. 5. 9, n. 4), notes that the attack is referred by Paul the Deacon in relation to events of the year 601 and rejects the identification of the island either with Tomis during the Avar attack of 597–598 or with a small island on the Danube, close to Viminacium, during to operations of 599.

90 *Registrum Epistolarum* 11, IX, 154 (Mai 599): Gregorius Callinico Exarcho Italiae. Inter haec quod mihi de Sclavis victorias nuntiaſtis, magna me laetitia relevatum esse cognoscite, quod latores praesentium de Capritana insula unitati sanctae ecclesiae coniungi festinantes ad beatum Petrum apostolum principem ab excellentia vestra transmissi sunt; Waldmüller 1976, 206–207; Pohl 1988a, 160; Dzino 2010, 98, n. 19; Štih 2010, 101; Bileta 2011, 111.

91 *Registrum Epistolarum*, 11, (Libri VIII–XIV), ed. L.M. Hartmann [MGH: Epp. 2], Berlin 1899. x. 15 (July 600) (Gregorius Maximo episcopo Salonitano): Et quidem de Sclavorum gente, quae vobis valde imminet, et affligor vehementer et conturbor. Affligor in his quae iam in vobis patior: conturbor, quia per Histriae aditum iam ad Italiam intrare coeperunt; See

for the Holy See, because of numerous papal *patrimonia* in existence there until the late sixth century.⁹² At the end of 601, Byzantine Istria was attacked by Avars, Slavs, and Lombards,⁹³ while in August 603, Avars and Slavs helped the Lombards to take Cremona.⁹⁴ These testimonies, combined with those on the conflicts between the Slavs and the Bavarians in the late sixth century, show clearly that the Slavs had already settled in the valleys of the rivers Sava and Drava.⁹⁵

Maurice, who faced more discontent from the army and the people, had no choice but to continue the operations against the Avars. However, he made the error of placing his brother Peter one more time at the command of the troops, instead of Priscus. In September 601 Peter was in Palastolon by the Danube, when he was informed that the Avars, under Apsikh, had concentrated their forces in the Iron Gates region, to the east from Singidunum. After fruitless negotiations between the two sides, Peter returned to Thrace, while the Avar army moved in the direction of Constantiola.⁹⁶ In the summer of 602, Maurice was informed that the Avars were making preparations for an attack. However, instead of concentrating on the Avars, he commanded Peter to attack the Slavs. Peter sent to the lands north of the Danube his major-general Godwin, who carried out mopping-up operations.⁹⁷ At the same time, in order to revive the area of Thrace demographically and economically, Maurice sought to transfer and settle there 30,000 Armenian families.⁹⁸ The Avars did not launch any attacks on the Byzantine territory, but, lead by Apsikh, they turned against the Antes, allies of Byzantium. Although Simocatta makes no reference to the campaign's result, it is believed that Apsikh defeated the Antes, who are mentioned

Pohl 1988a, 147; Waldmüller 1976, 204–205, 207, 250; Dzino 2010, 88, 97–98, who identifies the raid with the testimony of Paul the Deacon (see below, n. 93), dating it to 599–600; Štih 2010, 101.

92 Škegro 2004, 429–438; See also Dzino 2010, 99.

93 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV. 24, 125: Inter haec Langobardi cum Avaribus et Sclavis Histrorum fines ingressi, universa ignibus et rapinis vastavere; Avenarius 1974, 121; Fritze 1982, 64; Bertels 1987, 96–97; Pohl 1988a, 159–160; Christie 1998, 91; Dzino 2010, 98; Štih 2010, 101.

94 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV. 28, 125–126; Avenarius 1974, 121; Tirr 1976, 117; Pohl 1988a, 160; Christou 1991, 156; Krahwinkel 1992, 39; Curta 2001a, 99.

95 Štih 2010, 91.

96 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 4. 9–5. 7, 290–292; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 284; Kollautz 1968, 148; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 180; Avenarius 1974, 108; Popović 1975, 474; Pohl 1988a, 160, 187; Ziemann 2007, 122; Liebeschuetz 2015, 455–456.

97 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 5. 8–12, 292–293; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 284; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 181; Pohl 1988a, 160; Ziemann 2007, 122.

98 Sebeos, *Armenian History*, I, 30. 105, 56; Carile 2000, 187; Hacıkyan 2002, 32–33.

for last time in the sources in 602.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the long-time conflicts seemed to have had negative consequences for the Avar army as well, as many soldiers defected and sought asylum in Byzantium.¹⁰⁰ Such desertions had a great moral impact on the Avars, as indicated the *Strategikon*.¹⁰¹

Although the Avar army showed signs of decomposition, Maurice continued the war against the Slavs. However, his renewed command for the soldiers to spend the winter in the lands north of the Danube led to mutiny.¹⁰² The efforts of the emperor and his generals to impose discipline on the army failed miserably. Control had escaped from the hands of Maurice and had gone to the soldiers, who proclaimed the centurion Phocas as emperor. The latter led the army to the capital and ascended the throne in November 602, after murdering Maurice and his family.¹⁰³ This development brought the end of the ten-year counter-attack of the Byzantines in the Balkans, as Phocas did not undertake any new operations against the Avars and the Slavs. Simultaneously, it was the beginning of the end for the Byzantine presence on the Lower Danube as “a controlled frontier had not been reestablished.” Crucial for this evolution was also the new outbreak of hostilities in the East.¹⁰⁴

Having presented the Byzantine military operations from 592 to 602, we may estimate the reasons for their failure, in other words the necessary pre-suppositions on fiscal-social and military level for long-term operations that render them feasible or not. Taking into account the first, and regarding initially the population of the Balkan provinces, to the exception of the coastal areas, in the sixth century Northern and Central Balkans we have clearly to do with a phenomenon called *desintegration and ruralisation*, characterized by the retreat of the civil life and the elimination of both the extent and the importance

99 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 5. 13, 293 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 217): But the Chagan, when he had learned of the Roman incursions, dispatched Apsikh with soldiers to destroy the nation of the Antes, which was in fact allied to the Romans; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 284; Avenarius 1974, 109; Fritze 1982, 73; Pohl 1988a, 160–161; Curta 2001a, 81, 105; Kardaras 2016, 113.

100 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 6. 1, 293; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 284; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 181–182; Pohl 1988a, 161; Golden 2011a, 94.

101 *Strategikon*, XI, 2, 366.

102 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 6. 2, 293–294; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 286; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 182; Avenarius 1974, 109; Pohl 1988a, 161; Shlosser 1994, 94, 102; Curta 2001a, 105–106; Whitby 2004, 106.

103 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 6. 3–11. 6, 294–305; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 286–290; Kol-lautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 255; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1970, 182; Pohl 1988a, 161–162; Schreiner 1994, 29–30; Madgearu 1996, 51–52; Whitby 2004, 106–108; Ziemann 2007, 122–123; Liebeschuetz 2015, 456.

104 Liebeschuetz 2015, 457–458. See also next chapter.

of the known cities. The latter, regrouped around a defensible acropolis, often take the form of forts, while the inhabitants were mostly occupied with agriculture than crafts. Because of the ongoing crisis and the wars, a large number of settlements were destroyed and abandoned during the reign of Maurice.¹⁰⁵ According to Florin Curta, “the last decades of the Balkan cities may thus have witnessed a rise in the number of poorer citizens. Querns, spindle whorls, baking ovens, and smithies may illustrate a process of ruralisation, which immediately preceded and was encouraged by the Slavic invasions”.¹⁰⁶ We may refer here the example of Iatrus, which, although survived up to the early seventh century, the last phase of the finds “contain a large number of species, particularly dog and wild animals, which suggests an increasing reliance on hunting for meat procurement”.¹⁰⁷

The importance of certain towns and fortresses along the Danube frontier, both for the defense capabilities of Byzantium and the economic activity in the region during the second half of the sixth century is reflected in Simocatta’s terminology, for he employs for their description such diverse terms as those for *city*, *town*, *township* and *fort*. In three different cases (584, 592 and 595), Simocatta calls Singidunum either a *city* or a *town*.¹⁰⁸ During the Avar attack in the summer of 584, the *cities* of Viminacium and Augustae are mentioned.¹⁰⁹ Ratiaria, Bononia, Aquis, and Dorostolon are *cities* mentioned in relation to the Avar attack of 585,¹¹⁰ while Appiaria appears in the context of its siege by the Avars in 586/87 as a *fort*.¹¹¹ In the summer of 594, the Byzantine general Peter, marched through the *cities* of Iatrus (also mentioned in relation to Comentiolus in the spring of 598), Theodoropolis, and Novae as well as the *forts* Pistus

105 Poulter 1992, 123–132; Curta 2001a, 132, 142–143, 158, 160; Leontsini 2006, 197–202; Milinković 2007, 179–182, 185–187.

106 Curta 2001a, 145.

107 Ibidem, 158, 188.

108 Simocatta, *History*, I, 4. 1–3, 46 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 24): ... he collected his forces, and captured by surprise the city of Singidunum; ibidem, VI, 4. 2–3, 226 and VII, 11. 7, 264; Schreiner 1986, 60.

109 Simocatta, *History*, I, 4. 4, 47 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 25): After destroying Augustae and Viminacium (these are illustrious cities in the tax district of Illyricum) ... Schreiner 1986, 62.

110 Simocatta, *History*, I, 8. 10, 54–55 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 31): ... and captured many cities, Rateria, Bononia, Aquis, Dorostolon, Zaldapa, Pannasa, Marcianopolis, and Tropaion; Schreiner 1986, 62.

111 Simocatta, *History*, II, 15. 13, 101. (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 65): ... and captured the fort of Appiaria; Schreiner 1986, 62.

and Latarkion.¹¹² Asemus is both a *city* and a *township* in that same account of Peter's expedition, but appears as *fort* in 602, before the rebellion of Phocas.¹¹³

The sources and the archaeological data allow to provide some examples and to draw conclusions about the overall situation on the sixth century Balkans, particularly after 570. The economic decline of the Balkans' interior is confirmed by the lack of lead seals, namely the disruption of commercial links with the coastal trade centers or other areas.¹¹⁴ Another aspect of the crisis is the deposition of low denomination copper coins, likely because inflation, which increased after 570 throughout the entire Balkan peninsula. On the other hand, a remarkable phenomenon of the late sixth century is the deposition of hoards of gold, between five and nine *solidi*, which concerns payments to the army (*donativa*).¹¹⁵ Regardless of the interpretations given, it is obvious that such a phenomenon testifies the disorganisation of the economic activity, as *donativa* was crucial for the activity of the local economies, mostly along the Danubian *limes*.

Last, but not least, the sixth century crisis and the wars in the Balkans brought to light the problem of the *annona* (the central distribution of grain for the frontier troops) as that system was no more sufficient for their subsistence. Since the reign of Anastasius I, the Byzantine emperors attempted to solve the problem of making the much impoverished and depopulated Balkan provinces able of producing enough food for the troops who defended the northern frontier of the Empire by various fiscal or administrative measures. For example, during the reign of Justin II, the cost of protecting the Danube frontier from Avar and Slavic attacks became obvious, in terms of negative effects on the economic life of the Byzantine northern provinces. Although the intense aggressive activity of the two peoples is observed after 576/77, the great financial burden for the supply of troops forced the emperor to relieve the peasants of Illyricum, Moesia and Scythia Minor from taxes in 566 and, again, in 575. However, nothing changed the unfavorable position of the Byzantine soldiers fighting both the Avars and the Slavs, who often should rely on food captured from the enemy for their survival.¹¹⁶

On the military level, the investigation of the first phase of the Byzantine counter-attack may lead to some presuppositions that the Byzantine army had

112 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 2. 16–19, 249; *ibidem*, VII, 13. 9, 268; Schreiner 1986, 62; Curta 2001a, 126, 158.

113 Simocatta, *History*, VII, 3, 249–251; *ibidem*, VIII, 6. 7, 294; Schreiner 1986, 62.

114 Curta 2001a, 144; Milinković 2007, 186.

115 Curta 2001a, 169–181.

116 See, *NJ* 148 and 163 (722–723, 749–751); Curta 2001a, 188; *idem* 2001b, 206; see also below, n. 138.

to expel the Avars and the Slavs north of the Danube. When Maurice rose to the throne in 582, the Byzantines had to face an unfavorable situation in the Balkans, which was difficult to change. Because of the wars with the Persians, to which Maurice turned his attention during the first half of his reign, the Byzantine position in the Balkan peninsula deteriorated until the beginning of the campaign of 592. Furthermore, Maurice had to wage war on two fronts, against the Avars in the Middle, and against the independent Slavic tribes in the Lower Danube region. The Byzantine army may not have had the required strength for such an enterprise and could not confront, simultaneously and effectively, the two opponents. In addition to a lack of adequate forces, the fighting capabilities of the Byzantine army were limited by repeated cases of insubordination, if not outright mutiny. The reaction of soldiers to the emperor's order to winter in the lands north of the Danube in 593, as well as the subsequent refusal of Priscus to obey the command of Maurice, resulted in the disobedience of the troops. The army also reacted with discontent at the idea of surrendering some war prisoners to the Avars in 594. In that same year, Maurice's whittling down of military salaries showed that the emperor lacked the financial means for a long-drawn war in the Balkans. This must have added greater friction with the local populations, as in Asemus in 594, when Peter tried to take with him the town's garrison.

Some of the unfelicitous decision of Emperor Maurice, who never participated in the Balkan operations, may certainly be associated with the above-mentioned factors. The emperor may not have correctly evaluated the challenges his army was facing when he ordered the troops to spend the winter of 593 outside the empire. Furthermore, he replaced Priscus with Peter in 594, because of the division of spoils with the Avars. The latter incident shows the divergent views of Maurice and his general, who understood clearly that he could not fight against Avars and Slavs at the same time. The Byzantine operations in the Balkans between 592 and 594 made obvious the inherent weaknesses of the Byzantine army. The lack of forces, discipline, money and Maurice's poor decisions are ultimately responsible for the strategic failure of the Byzantine counterattack. Those weaknesses became salient during the later phase of operations and were decisive for their final outcome.

Furthermore, a crucial question is that of the priorities of this campaign and the scale of its objectives. According to Florin Curta, Maurice's campaigns were directed primarily against the Slavs, and only in the second place against the Avars.¹¹⁷ From the examination of the whole conflict, the conclusion may indeed be drawn that the Byzantines waged war mainly against the Slavs, while

117 Curta 2001a, 100.

observing the movements of the Avars. The only exception to that is the campaign of 599–600. However, no source indicates that that was Maurice's initial plan in 592. Both Simocatta and Theophanes state clearly that Maurice transferred his troops to the Balkans for a war against the Avars.¹¹⁸ The latter were undoubtedly more powerful and more dangerous than the Slavic tribes of the Lower Danube and that was the direction of the Byzantine counter-attack.

In Maurice's view, the Slavs constituted a small detail of the main problem, the Avars. The emperor, though forced to fight them, hoped to curb the Slavic raids in order to concentrate his effort on the Avars. The course of events, however, was completely different, as the Byzantines were involved in an unpredictable and lengthy war with the Slavs, which was not the initial plan, but arose from faulty estimations. The Byzantine army suffered a defeat in 594 on the river Helibacia, while the adverse climatic conditions north of the Lower Danube made Maurice's efforts more difficult and caused turmoil. The desired result was not achieved, even with the destruction of settlements and the slaughter or transfer of large numbers of prisoners to the Byzantine territory. Moreover, one should not ignore the general lack of interest of the Byzantine soldiers in waging war against the Slavs. Those operations were "a painful war with little booty and glory"¹¹⁹ or even "punitive, not aimed at permanent pacification."¹²⁰

The apparent priority of the Slavs on Maurice's modified war agenda was the necessary presupposition in order to undertake systematic operations against the Avars. The war on the Slavs does not reflect the main objective, but the weakness of the Byzantines. These presuppositions were the excellent conditions for communication and supply from Thrace to the Danube, which could not exist as long as the Slavic raids continued in the Balkan provinces. Furthermore, the Slavic tribes under Avar rule in the Lower Danube region were a reserve for the Avar army, which had to be eliminated. Obligated to conduct war on two fronts, Maurice did not correctly estimate the Slavic problem and, as a consequence, his counter-offensive was spent more against the Slavs than the Avars. From being just an element of a general campaign to *Avaria*, the Slavs became the main target, which led to a deviation from the initial

118 Simocatta, *History*, v, 16. 1, 218 (Whitby, *Simocatta*, 155): ... the emperor transferred his forces with all speed to Europe and prepared an expedition to Anchialus: for he had learned that the Avars were again wishing to roam abroad; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 267 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 390): While a deep peace prevailed in the East, the Avar War seethed in Europe. For this reason the emperor Maurice transferred his armies from the East to Thrace.

119 Pohl 1988a, 208.

120 Liebeschuetz 2015, 456–457.

objective. Without having solved the Slavic problem and with an ever greater backlash against him, Maurice needed a military success after the betrayal and defeat of Commentiolus in 598 and his ill-thought refusal to ransom the 12,000 captives from the Avars. The violation of the treaty of 598, which was rather favorable for the Byzantines, was perhaps the only possibility Maurice had to take the Avars by surprise and to use an advantageous position, as the above-mentioned necessary presuppositions were not ever met. On the contrary, soon after that they contributed to Maurice's downfall.

2.5 The Collapse of the Byzantine Frontier on the Danube and the Fall of the Balkan Provinces

A new situation formed in the Balkans in 602 that put the Avars in a powerful position as the Danube frontier remained defenseless after the withdrawal of the Byzantine army. The overthrow of Maurice is associated, by some scholars, with the collapse of the Byzantine defense system on the Lower Danube as the Avars and the Slavs raided without facing resistance in the Balkan provinces.¹²¹

Emperor Phocas (602–610) was forced during his reign to address both the Avars and the Slavic tribes of the Lower Danube as well as the Persians. The Slavs, despite the extensive operations of Maurice, remained likely quite fightworthy. On the night of October 26, 604, 5,000 Slavs attempted an attack on Thessalonica, but their actions were promptly intercepted and they were repelled in open battle.¹²² In 603/04, a new war with the Persians broke out, which caused significant territorial losses to the Byzantines.¹²³ Following the tactics of his predecessors when faced with simultaneous attacks in the Balkans and the East, Phocas purchased peace with the Avars in 604 by increasing the annual tribute to 140,000 gold coins, and transferred the troops of the European provinces to Asia Minor.¹²⁴ The treaty of Phocas with the Avars is likely

121 Comşa 1974, 79, 81; Popović 1975, 445; Fine 1983, 33–34; Pohl 1988a, 237.

122 *Miracles* I (106–108), 126 (ibidem, 11, 72–73); Pohl 1988a, 240–241; Madgearu 1997, 323 (Avar attack); On the date of the attack in 581–584, see Popović 1975, 450–451; Curta 2001a, 93–94; Ziemann 2007, 123–124.

123 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 292; Dignas and Winter 2007, 115–116; Luttwak 2009, 393; Jalilipour 2014, 3.

124 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 292 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 420): As for Phokas, he conveyed the armies from Europe to Asia after increasing the tribute to the Chagan in the belief that the Avar nation was at rest; Fine 1983, 33; Pohl 1988a, 238; Madgearu 1996, 52; Ziemann 2007, 123.

related to the Avar attack of 604 on Thrace.¹²⁵ Despite the conclusion of the treaty, the Avars attacked the Balkan provinces in 609/10, possibly along with the Slavs. According to John of Nikiu, their attacks were met with successful resistance only in Thessalonica.¹²⁶ To deal with the invasions in the Balkans, as well as to avoid opening new war fronts, Phocas sought allies in the West. Through the mediation of Pope Gregory I (590–604), the Queen of Austrasia, Brunhilde (d. 613), and her grandson Theudebert II (595–613) entered into an alliance with Byzantium in 602/03.¹²⁷ In 603, 605 and 608 Phocas also renewed the peace treaties with the Lombards.¹²⁸

In 610, shortly before the fall of Phocas, the youngest son of Baian succeeded his elder brother.¹²⁹ The new khagan was hostile to the Lombard King Agilulf, as in 610/11 he invaded Friuli, where he crushed the Lombard duke Gisulf II and destroyed Forum Iulii (Cividale).¹³⁰ Following the Avar attack, the Carinthian Slavs defeated the Bavarians close to Aguntum (eastern Tyrol), plundered Bavarian territories in the Upper Drava valley¹³¹ and devastated Byzantine Istria.¹³²

The tyrannical rule of Phocas led a large part of the people against him and in the autumn of 610 he was overthrown. His successor Heraclius (610–641), the son of the exarch of Carthage, was faced with a chaotic situation in the interior, as the state's economy had been shaken by civil conflicts and the army had almost dissolved. Furthermore, he faced a dire situation, both in the Balkans

125 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 290; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 1, 256; Avenarius 1974, 110; Pohl 1988a, 237.

126 John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, 109. 18, 175–176: And in regard to Rome it is recounted that the kings of (this) epoch had by means of the barbarians and the nations and the Illyrians devastated Christian cities and carried off their inhabitants captive, ... But all the province was devastated and depopulated; Avenarius 1974, 110; Popović 1975, 489–490; Lilie 1985, 19; Pohl 1988a, 237–238; Madgearu 1997, 323 (Avar attack); Ziemann 2007, 124.

127 See *Registrum Epistolarum* II, XLIII, 7; Lounghis 1980, 104; Schreiner 1985, 199–200; Drauschke 2011, 257.

128 Avenarius 1974, 122; Christou, *Byzanz*, 158; Lounghis, *Byzantinischen Gesandten*, 58; idem, *Ambassades*, 105; Christie 1998, 91.

129 Olajos 1976, 158; Pohl 1988a, 238.

130 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV. 38, 128–132; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 1, 266; Avenarius 1974, 122; Wolfram 1985, 126; Christou 1991, 160; Krahwinkel 1992, 39–40; Christie 1998, 93–94; Štih 2010, 101–102.

131 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV 39, 133 (610/11?): His temporibus mortuo Tassilone duce Baiuvariorum, filius eius Garibaldus in Agunto a Sclavis devictus est, et Baioariorum termini deprædatur. Resumptis tamen Baioarii viribus et prædas ab hostibus excutunt et hostes de suis finibus pepulerunt; Pohl 1988a, 239; Curta 2001a, 99, n. 80; Štih 2010, 101, 114.

132 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV 40, 133 (611): Hoc nihilominus anno Sclavi Histriam, interfectis militibus, lacrimabiliter deprædati sunt; Curta 2001a, 106–107; Dzino 2010, 98.

and the East, where powerful enemies inflicted several defeats upon the Byzantines over the first ten years of his reign.¹³³ During that time, the Persians conquered the richest provinces of Byzantium, Syria between 610/11 and 613, Palestine in 614 and Egypt in 619.¹³⁴

As already noted, Maurice's overthrow is often associated with the collapse of the Byzantine frontier at the Lower Danube. Many scholars have re-examined critically the traditional view, according to which there was an immediate collapse of the frontier in 602. Over the last few decades, a different view has gained support: the collapse of the frontier happened gradually and the main arguments for such a revision are archeological (see below). Historians have also turned to a critical re-evaluation of the negative image of Phocas in Byzantine sources, in sharp contrast to that of Emperor Heraclius.¹³⁵ Consequently, the actual impact of Phocas' rebellion for the Danubian provinces had to be re-evaluated as well, in the light of a more objective approach to the events taking place between 602 and 610.¹³⁶

On the basis of the *Armenian History* of Sebeos, Florin Curta has argued that after the overthrow of Maurice the army returned to the Danube and remained there until 620, when Heraclius transferred all the Byzantine forces for the war against the Persians: "In the 14th year of king Khosrov, the 20th year of the reign of Maurice, the Greek army in the region of Thrace rebelled from the emperor and installed as their king a certain man called Phocas. They went in unison to Constantinople, killed the king Maurice and his sons, and installed Phocas on the throne of the kingdom. Then they returned to the regions of Thrace against the enemy."¹³⁷

The same scholar attributed the collapse of the Byzantine frontier on the Danube and the withdrawal of the Byzantine forces from the Balkans to the breaking down of the distribution's network and the interruption of supply to the towns and the forts from the central administration. According to Curta, the sixth-century supply system of the army (*annona militaris*) still relied on

133 Haldon 1990, 36–37, 41–43; Kaegi 2003, 77–80, 91–92; Luttwak 2009, 397. On the reactions against the consolidation of Heraclius' power in Asia Minor, see Kaegi 1973, 308–330.

134 Dignas and Winter 2007, 45, 117–118; Luttwak 2009, 394–395; Jalalipour 2014, 1–13.

135 Certain scholars consider the reign of Phocas as not an age of crisis and attribute to Heraclius the downfall of the defence system on the Danube as well as the rot set in the state machinery. See Lilie 1985, 17–43; Madgearu 1997, 322–324. On the discussion, see also Curta 2001a, 104–105; Meier 2014, 139–174.

136 Madgearu 1997, 315–316, 322–324, who assumes that the downfall of the Danubian *limes* had four phases: 576–586, 593–598, 602–604 and 614–626; idem 2001, 211; Curta 2001a, 106; idem 2001b, 212; Zahariade 2007, 231.

137 Sebeos, *Armenian History*, I, 31. 106, 57 (Thomson); Curta 2001a, 106, 189, 338; idem 2001b, 212; idem 2006, 69.

the central distribution of grain, since, despite the measures taken by the Byzantine emperors, Scythia Minor and Moesia II could not sustain the troops stationed on the frontier. To support that point of view, Curta cites the *Strategikon*, particularly the passage where its author recommends that during the campaign in Slavic lands north of the Danube, “the provisions found in the surrounding countryside should not simply be wasted but shipped on pack animals and boats to our own country.”¹³⁸ On the other hand, he attributes the two mutinies of the Byzantine army on the Danube frontier (594 and 602) to “the deterioration of the living standards and the social status of the field army,” namely the emperor’s decision to cut the salaries of the military. Curta dates the abandonment of the Byzantine frontier on the Danube to 620, and treats as crucial the withdrawal of the Byzantine army and the definite cessation of grain supplies (*annona*) from Egypt, following its occupation by the Persians.¹³⁹

Whether or not one accepts the idea of a gradual collapse of the Danube *limes*, the possibility of a Byzantine army’s presence in the region until the reign of Heraclius should be rejected. In regards to the testimony of Sebeos, the name “Thrace” could be interpreted either as the Thracian diocese, including Eastern Balkans and, thus, quite general, or the province of Thracia, covering modern southwestern Bulgaria and, subsequently, has nothing to do with the Danube. In the same source, in a description of the attack of Priscus in 593, there is a clear reference to the river Danube: “So they went to attack the peoples who occupied the western regions on the bank of the great river Danube. There was a fierce war over the face of that land. The power of the enemy was crushed before the Greek army, which put them to flight across the river Danube. They themselves promptly sent a messenger bearing news of the great victory to the emperor and all the palace.”¹⁴⁰

Even if one accepts that Phocas’ troops returned to the Danube, their presence there must have been shortly lived, much like until the treaty of 604, when Phocas moved the European troops on the eastern borders. The transfer of the troops from Europe to Asia by Phocas (as well as Heraclius in 620)¹⁴¹ rather concerned small military units that encamped close to Constantinople or in the southern Balkans and not border troops. Furthermore, Curta argues that there is no evidence of raids by the Avars or the Slavs during the reign of

138 *Strategikon*, XI. 4, 380.

139 Curta 2001a, 188–189; idem 2001b, 199–217; see also Goutzioukostas and Moniaros 2009, 145–158.

140 Sebeos, *Armenian History*, I, 18. 90, 36 (Thomson); (ibidem, II. 16, 178). For the “Thrace” see also Curta 2001a, 79, n. 21 and 173, fig. 5.

141 See below, n. 221.

Phocas.¹⁴² However, as noted above, the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius* record a Slavic attack against Thessalonica, probably in 604, and John of Nikiu accounts large scale invasions in 609/10. The treaty of 604, despite the increase in the annual tribute, did not prevent the attacks of Avars and Slavic tribes, resulted in the gradual settlement of the latter south of the Danube.¹⁴³

The idea of a gradual collapse of the Danubian *limes* is based primarily on archeological data. As mentioned, the Danube frontier first collapsed in the western part (Moesia I and Dacia Ripuaria) in 596–598, with the exception of some urban centers such as Singidunum and Viminacium. The discussion of the collapse of the Byzantine frontier in 602 has centered instead on the area of Moesia II and Scythia Minor. The fall of the latter meant simultaneously the end of the Danubian *limes*, ascribed to the Avar and Slavic attacks as well as to the gradual economic decline of the Danubian provinces.¹⁴⁴

According to the archaeological data, catastrophes took place before 600 in a number of cities and fortresses of the Scythian *limes* (Sucidava, Axiopolis, Beroe, Troesmis, Dinogetia, and Salsovia),¹⁴⁵ while the destruction of others around 602, such as Sacidava, Novae, and Iatrus could be related to the rebellion of Phocas.¹⁴⁶ After 602, excluding Scythia Minor, the coin circulation continued only at Novae (until 612)¹⁴⁷ and possibly at Dorostolon.¹⁴⁸ Regarding Beroe and Capidava, the numismatic finds reach up to 602/10 and 607/08 respectively.¹⁴⁹

According to the numismatic finds in Scythia Minor, the fall of the Scythian *limes* was completed during the reign of Heraclius, especially in his early years. Because of the Avar and Slavic attacks, the coins' circulation ceased up to 614/15 in many cities and forts, such as Aegyssus (613/14), Nufăru (613/14), Axiopolis (613/14), Argamum (610/16), Halmyris (612/13), Sacidava (615/16), Tropaeum (614/15), Ulmetum (614/15) and, likely later, Carsium (629/30) and Noviodunum (610/41).¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, the important coastal cities, i.e.

142 Curta 2001a, 106, 338.

143 Ditten 1978a, 95; Haldon 1990, 35; see also Curta 2001a, 104–105.

144 Madgearu 2007, 265.

145 Dimitrov 1997, 30.

146 Madgearu 1997, 323.

147 Ibidem, 265.

148 Soustal 1997, 119; Angelova and Buchvarov 2007, 64, 72, 83, who assume that the coin finds in Dorostolon reach up to the reign of Phocas while two more coins of Emperors Heraclius and Constantine IV respectively were found at the riverbank by accident.

149 Madgearu 2007, 265.

150 Madgearu 1997, 324; idem 2007, 265–266; Dimitrov 1997, 31; Zahariade 2007, 231–232; Cus-
turea and Nastasi 2013, 326.

Tomis (629/30), Histria (620/41) and Callatis (630/31) survived longer.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, in the region of Scythia Minor (mainly Tomis) and Dorostolon some lead seals dated to the sixth–seventh century came to light, and mention, among others, the names of Heraclius and Byzantine officers: *Domini nostri Heraclius et Heraclius Constantinus, perpetui Augusti* (ca. 613), Θεοδόσιος ἀπὸ ἐπάρχων and Νικαία στρατηλάτου. For the sixth–seventh century occur also a lead seal in Noviodunum and a Latin inscription in Lazus, the last extant Latin inscription in Scythia Minor.¹⁵²

Apart from the coins and the seals, an element for the continuance of urban life and the survival of certain cities and forts in the first decades of the seventh century, are the traces of fortifications or some buildings, that probably created or continued to be used at the very beginning of Heraclius' reign (Sacidava, Tropaeum, Histria, Callatis, Halmyris, Dorostolon, Axiopolis, Carsium, Ulmetum and Capidava).¹⁵³ In Histria, the *extra muros* occupation ended in the early seventh century. The city seems to be destroyed in c. 640, as only humble dwellings are observed. The *extra muros* occupation ended at about the same time in Argamum, while in Callatis construction works are recorded in the early seventh century (the precinct wall, a pavement and three fountains). Regarding the *intra muros* area of Tomis, an occupation dated to the late sixth–early seventh century includes simple dwelling structures. The main gate of the city, the edifice with mosaic and that with lentiaron, as well as the northern portico of the basilica continued to be used until the early seventh century.¹⁵⁴ The decline of the major ports of Scythia Minor after the second decade of the seventh century led to the de-urbanization phenomenon, “the end of town-life and the beginning of life in town,” namely the collapse of the urban life and the survival of the population in scarcely inhabited settlements.¹⁵⁵

The downfall of the Byzantine frontier on the Danube is observed also through a lack of the Sucidava-type buckles which occur mainly in the Eastern Balkans from the mid- to late sixth century, and last until the 630s. Such buckles were found in Ibida/Slava Rusă, Tropaeum, Sucidava, Drobeta/Turnu Severin, Histria, Dierna, Beroe, Aquis, Negotin, Ratiaria, and Novae.¹⁵⁶ On the

151 Bóna 2000, 165; Ivanišević 2006, 83; Madgearu 2007, 265–266; Zahariade 2007, 231–233; Custurea and Nastasi 2013, 326–327.

152 Jordanov 1997, 39; Soustal 1997, 118–119; Curta 2001a, 144; Zahariade 2007, 233; Angelova and Buchvarov 2007, 63–64; See also, Goutzioukostas and Moniaros 2009, 159–180.

153 Dimitrov 1997, 31; Curta 2001a, 155; Madgearu 2001, 210–211, 214; Zahariade 2007, 233–234.

154 Custurea and Nastasi 2013, 323–325.

155 Madgearu 2001, 207–217; Custurea and Nastasi 2013, 325–327.

156 Varsik 1992, 78–80; Fiedler 1992 I, 52–54, 71–73; Madgearu 1998, 217–222. See also Schulze-Dörlamm 2002 and 2009.

coast of Scythia Minor, Byzantine buckles of Pápa type have been in Argamum and Halmyris, with a *terminus ante quem* in 625. Byzantine buckles of the Pápa, Salona–Histria, and Syracuse types came to light in Histria along with belt decorations (late sixth–early seventh century), while later dating (mid-seventh century) is attributed to a buckle with cross-shaped decoration from Tomis. The distribution of the Salona–Histria type coincides with Sucidava type and also occurs in Danubian forts, as Dorostolon, Aquis and Drobeta, where there was a workshop. The buckle of Syracuse type that was found in Sacidava is dated to the early seventh century.¹⁵⁷ A Syracuse-type buckle was also found in Balta Verde (near the present-day Serbian-Romanian border, across the river Danube from Prahovo), in a cremation (presumably Slavic) grave.¹⁵⁸ Finally, Byzantine jewelry and buckles of the sixth and early seventh century have been discovered in Beroe.¹⁵⁹ Irrespective of the presence of the Byzantine army on the Danube, these data show that the urban life in Scythia Minor and in some forts along the river continued into the reign of Heraclius, and do not confirm Walter Pohl's view that the treaty of 604 protected from the Avar attacks only a small number of cities in the interior of the Balkans.¹⁶⁰

Scythia Minor (Dobroudja) had a particular position among the Danube provinces of the Empire, and within the framework of the Byzantine-Avar war. On the basis of Menander's testimony about negotiations between Lombards and Avars in 567 for the war against the Gepids, Alexandru Madgearu gave a particular interpretation of the passage in which the Lombard envoys agree that "the Avars will keep Scythia forever and so it will be easy for them to invade Thrace." From that, he drew the conclusion that "the Avars lived indeed for a certain time in Dobrudja," namely since 566.¹⁶¹ But Madgearu misunderstood the text, which in R.C. Blockley's translation reads in a very different way: "Furthermore, when this success had been achieved, Scythia and Thrace itself would thereafter be accessible to them." The passage makes clear that Scythia Minor was out of any Avar control and the establishment of an Avar khaganate in the Carpathian Basin was actually the motivation for the war against the Gepids. To such a conclusion lead with no doubt the words of the Lombard envoys: "In short, since they [the Avars] were starting out from neighbouring territory, they would be able effortlessly to ravage the land of the Romans and penetrate to Byzantium itself."¹⁶² The most important argument against Madgearu's

157 Varsik 1992, 80–81; Fiedler 1992 I, 58–63; Madgearu 2004, 169–176.

158 Fiedler 1992 I, 88–89.

159 Varsik 1992, 84; Fiedler 1992 I, 54–56.

160 See Pohl 1988a, 238.

161 Madgearu 2007, 264.

162 Menander, *History*, fr. 12.1, 128 (Blockley).

interpretation is that, before the establishment of the Avar khaganate, there is no reference in the sources to an Avar occupation of Scythia Minor, which would have prompted a mobilization of the Byzantine troops that could not have escaped the attention of the early Byzantine authors. Moreover, when the khagan is said to have returned to *Scythia* without any profit from the 568 siege of Sirmium,¹⁶³ *Scythia* does not refer to Dobrudja, but to the area just north of Sirmium, as the Avars had already established there their khaganate. Madgearu's understanding of the Byzantine involvement in the Lombard–Gepidic war at that same time to the – supposed – presence of the Avars in Dobrudja is not plausible.¹⁶⁴ In support of his interpretation, the Romanian historian used four buckles of Pápa type found in Histria, Jurilovca, Kaliakra and Halmyris/Murighiol. Such buckles, dated from the late sixth century to 630/50, are then regarded as products of “the workshops mastered by the Avars and for the export in the Byzantine Empire.”¹⁶⁵ However, Madgearu notes that the buckles in question developed from the Salona–Histria type, namely of Byzantine manufacture. He even points out that “all the buckles found in Dobrudja came from sites where the Byzantine coins continued to penetrate until circa 614.” In other words, those buckles are an indication not of an Avar, but of a Byzantine presence in the area. If Madgearu was right, then one would expect such “Avar” buckles to appear in great numbers after the collapse of the Byzantine *limes*. In reality, quite the opposite is true, as they disappear from the archaeological record once Byzantines lost control of the Lower Danube region.

Without any solid interpretation of the written sources, and with only four buckles in support of his thesis, Madgearu believes that the Avars imposed their control over the surviving cities-harbours of Scythia Minor, from which they collected tribute. In the case of Histria, he props his interpretation on one, single find of Nagyarsány-type of buckle from that site, “the single of its kind in Dobrudja and without any doubt of Pannonian origin.”¹⁶⁶ However, that type of buckle, most likely of Pannonian origin, has nothing to do with the Avars.¹⁶⁷ Madgearu also believes that, for the Avar military operations of 598, “all the province of Scythia contributed to the supplies, because it was then under the Avar domination.”¹⁶⁸ Such an argument is misleading, as “domination” means

163 See ch. 1.3, n. 45; Madgearu 2007, 264.

164 Madgearu 2007, 264.

165 Madgearu 2007, 267–270; but the Pápa type is generally recognized as a Byzantine buckle. See Garam 2001, 109–111; Gavrituchin 2008, 66–67; Müller 2010, 209.

166 Madgearu 2007, 270–271.

167 See Garam 2001, 54.

168 Madgearu 2007, 265.

integration into a military and administrative system and not, as in this case, a temporary control (if any). Instead, the Byzantine domination over that province was uninterrupted until the early seventh century.

Leaving aside the question of the Danube frontier's downfall, in the early reign of Heraclius a few Byzantine strongholds were still occupied in the Central Balkans. The date of their abandonment may be established with the help of archaeological, mostly numismatic, finds.¹⁶⁹ The written sources mention raids of the Slavs and the Avars in the Balkans simultaneously with the Persian attacks in the East, which may probably be dated to 614.¹⁷⁰ Slavic and Avar raids have already caused the end of many fortified towns, forts or strongholds along the Black Sea in Bulgaria, e.g. in the region of Dobrich (Careas, Yailata, Toprak Kale, Rusalka, Timum, Timum-West and Aphrodision), Tuzlata near Balchik, Akra near Chernomorets and Urdoviza (modern Kiten) in the region of Burgas. In many of those sites the latest coins recovered from excavations are those struck for Emperor Maurice.¹⁷¹ According to Aleksandăr Minchev, "the numismatic data collected in a recent publication revealed that a great change in the economy of *Moesia Secunda* and *Scythia* provinces happened in the late 70s of the sixth century, when the settlement network was heavily damaged or even destroyed by the continuous barbaric invasions in the following decades."¹⁷²

The *Miracles of Saint Demetrius* show that the Slavic attacks reached northern Greece, culminating in another siege of Thessalonica between 614 and 616.¹⁷³ After failing to take the city on their own, the Slavs sent gifts and an embassy to the Avars to ask for military assistance. The khagan accepted the proposal of the independent Slavic tribes, and after two years of preparation, the Avars, along with Slavs, Bulgars, and other subordinate tribes, reached the outskirts of Thessalonica in 617/18. Despite the great power and the siege engines they had brought with them, the attackers could not break the resistance of the city, which continued to receive supplies by the sea. The khagan was forced

169 Popović 1975, 491–504; Pohl 1988a, 242; Madgearu 1996, 54; Haldon 1990, 43; Wendel 2007, 511.

170 Isidore, *Major Chronicle*, 479 (5813/414); Theophanes, *Chronography*, 300; Zonaras, *Epitome*, 14, 15, 204; Avenarius 1974, 111 (in 615); Ditten 1978a, 96; Fritze 1982, 69; Lilie 1985, 20; Curta 2001a, 107; Kaegi 2003, 289; Ziemann 2007, 124; Liebeschuetz 2015, 459; see also Charanis 1971, 24, according to whom "Graecia" in the Isidore's account is identified with Illyricum and not the continental Greece.

171 Minchev 2013, 248–260.

172 Ibidem, 261.

173 *Miracles* I (179–194), 175–179 (ibidem, 11, 89–101, 177 (in 614); Avenarius 1973, 20–21; Waldmüller 1976, 258 (in 616); Ditten 1978a, 99; Curta 2001a, 107–108; Ziemann 2007, 125–126.

to raise the siege, which lasted 33 days, primarily because his army lacked provisions, but he withdrew only after obtaining a sum of money.¹⁷⁴

During Heraclius' reign, the Avars and the Slavs also overran Byzantine Dalmatia. In chapters 29 and 30 of his work, *De administrando imperio*, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus offers two different stories about the fall of Salona. In chapter 29, the Slavs, "who were called also Avars," and lived north of the Danube, occupied Salona by means of a stratagem, namely using the standards and the military insignia of captive soldiers. On the other hand, in chapter 30 the Slavs are not mentioned, only the Avars. The latter, after capturing the Dalmatian garrison, entered Salona wearing the clothes and using the standards and the insignia of their captives. They then occupied the major part of Dalmatia, and settled there.¹⁷⁵ As with the Croatian migration to the Western Balkans (see below), it must be noted that the story of how Salona was occupied has clearly a mythical background.¹⁷⁶

The exact date at which the Avars and the Slavs overran Byzantine Dalmatia (and, in the case of the Slavs, settled that area) has long been a topic of scholarly discussion. Until recently, the accepted view, relying on the epigraphic and numismatic evidence, dated the fall of Salona in 614 along with other Dalmatian cities such as Scardona/Skradin, Narona, Epidaurus/Cavtat, and Delminium, while the population took refuge either in fortified cities or in nearby islands.¹⁷⁷ However, a later coin hoard discovered in Salona includes 51 Byzantine bronze coins, the oldest of Justinian and the youngest of Heraclius. The last of them was minted between 625 and 630/31, while two others were struck in 614/15.¹⁷⁸ The hoard prompted the re-dating of the fall of Salona between 622 and 626¹⁷⁹ or, according to Ivan Marović, between 631 and 639, in association with the migration of the Croats to the Balkans.¹⁸⁰ The Croatian numismatist proposed a *terminus ante quem* of 639 having in mind the mission

174 *Miracles* I (195–215), 184–189 (ibidem, 11, 184–185); Avenarius 1973, 21; idem 1974, 112; Waldmüller 1976, 258–260; Fine 1983, 41–42; Pohl 1988a, 242–243; Curta 2001a, 108; Ziemann 2007, 126–127; Nikolov 2017, 68. On the date of the siege, see Pohl, op. cit., 423 (ch. 7. 1, n. 36).

175 DAI 29, 122–124; ibidem, 30, 140–142; Fine 1983, 34–35, 50, who assumes that Dalmatia was occupied only by Avars and then colonized by them; Marović 1984, 304; Jakšić 1984, 318–322; Belke and Soustal 1995, 144–145, 159–161.

176 Pohl 1988a, 243; Dzino 2010, 104–105, 111–112; Borri 2011, 210; Budak 2012, 54; Curta 2013, 810–811.

177 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 263–264; Popović 1975, 465–466, 487–488; Marović 1984, 295–297; Gazi 1993, 15; Belke and Soustal 1995, 153, n. 300; Dzino 2010, 87, 156, 159.

178 Oreb 1984, 29; Marović 1984, 298–303; Pohl 1988a, 244; Petrinec 2010, 198; Curta 2013, 810.

179 Jakšić 1984, 325–326.

180 Marović 1984, 302–306; Belke and Soustal 1995, 145, n. 274.

of the abbot Martin to Dalmatia. Martin came in 640/41 to redeem war captives and to transfer the relics of the martyrs from the ruins of Salona to Rome.¹⁸¹ On the other hand, Constantine VII mentions the names of several cities and islands in the Adriatic Sea which supposedly remained in Byzantine hands,¹⁸² but it is doubtful whether his records are complete and whether those were important urban centers.

Elements of the Dalmatian local tradition may also be observed in the narrative of Thomas, Archdeacon of Spalatum (Split), who wrote in the mid-thirteenth century about the fall of the Dalmatian cities. His *Historia Salonitana* presents Split as the heir of the former bishopric of Salona, no doubt in order to justify the claims of Split to the respective territory. Thomas has two versions of the fall of Salona. The first, which is also followed by the Priest of Dioclea, has the Goths under Totila, along with *tribus nobilium* called Lingones, coming from the north and occupying the city. According to the second version, Salona fell into the hands of an unnamed Gothic ruler of Dalmatia. Furthermore, Thomas has Salonitans fleeing to the islands of the Adriatic Sea as well as to the palace of Diocletian, an event followed by foundation of Split.¹⁸³

2.6 The Revolt of Samo

Western sources place in the year 623/24 a great revolt of the Slavs against the Avars under the leadership of Samo. This is believed to be the first disruptive movement inside the Avar khaganate after the migration of the Avars to the Middle Danube region. No Byzantine source mentions Samo's revolt. Instead, the information derives mainly from the fourth book of the *Chronicle* of Fredegar¹⁸⁴ (ca. 660), and from two other sources based on it, the *Gesta Dagoberti*¹⁸⁵ (ca. 835) and the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*¹⁸⁶ (ca. 870), though they have significant differences between them.

181 Marović 1984, 294. On Martin's mission, see Waldmüller 1976, 312–313, 391; Belke and Soustal 1995, 169, n. 357; Petrinc 2010, 201; Dzino 2010, 98–99.

182 DAI, 29, 124; Ferluga 1976a, 133–134; idem 1976b, 143; Fine 1983, 35; Gazi 1993, 15; Belke and Soustal 1995, 145.

183 Dzino 2010, 87–88, 93, 99–104, 156, 212, who asserts (op. cit., 159) that “the stories of the sack of the Dalmatian cities by invaders from the north were simply the way in which the medieval population tried to explain their past.”

184 The references of Fredegar about Samo are mostly occur in ch. 48 and 68 and, secondly, in ch. 72, 74–75 and 77 of the Book IV in his Chronicle. See Curta 1997, 141–167; Eggers 2001, 62–63; Broome 2014, 128.

185 *Gesta Dagoberti*, 396–425.

186 See *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*.

Some have treated the revolt of Samo and the establishment of “the first Slavic state” as the result of the Byzantine diplomatic activity against the Avars.¹⁸⁷ Andreas N. Stratos even believed that Samo’s revolt coincided in time with the ambush in which the Avars were about to capture Heraclius (see below) in retaliation for the Byzantine involvement into the Avar area of influence.¹⁸⁸ Others have linked to those events two coins of Heraclius struck before 626 (one solidus and one gilded silver imitation) found in Bohemia.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, Samo’s presence among the Slavs is believed to be part of the plans of the king of Austrasia, Dagobert I (623–638) to expand into Central Europe and to subdue both (Western) Slavs and Avars.¹⁹⁰ But in 631, Samo defeated the army of Dagobert at Wogastisburg.¹⁹¹ Samo ruled over the “Wends” for 35 years and after his death in 658, “the first Slavic state” ceased to exist.¹⁹²

A long-discussed issue is that of the location of Samo’s polity, which some have placed in Bohemia (the western part of the present-day Czech Republic).¹⁹³ Others have suggested Moravia,¹⁹⁴ Lower Austria,¹⁹⁵ northeastern Bavaria,¹⁹⁶ or the Eastern Alps (the Carantanian theory).¹⁹⁷ Still others believe that, at the peak of its power, Samo’s “realm” covered a large area from Bohemia and Saxony to Carinthia.¹⁹⁸ If Samo’s polity was on the territory of the Czech Republic, there are serious problems with the idea of a Byzantine intervention and support of a revolt in the northwestern borderland of the Avar khaganate. For such an intervention to take place, one would need some political or military foothold for establishing some contact with the Wends of Bohemia. This issue has

187 Chaloupecký 1950, 229; Obolensky 1971, 59; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 231. Ditten 1978a, 127; Haldon 1990, 46–47.

188 Stratos 1967, 370–371.

189 Profantová 2008, 217; Militky 2009, 359–360, 364.

190 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV, 58, 224.... et Avaros et Sclavos citerasque gentium nationes usque manum publicam suae dicione subiciendum fiducialiter spondebant; *Gesta Dagoberti*, 22, 408; Avenarius 1974, 135–136; Schlesinger 1975, 9; Broome 2014, 103.

191 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV, 68, 236–238; Waldmüller 1976, 298; Pohl 1988a, 260; Eggers 2001, 71.

192 Dvornik 1970, 64; Avenarius 1974, 138; Waldmüller 1976, 303; Pohl 1988a, 257, 261; Geary 1996, 160.

193 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 231, 235 (Thuringia and Bohemia); Waldmüller 1976, 296; Wolfram 1985, 130.

194 Chaloupecký 1950, 229, 234; Dvornik 1970, 64; Fritze 1994, 99 (Moravia); See also Eggers 2001, 72, n. 67.

195 Öttinger 1951, 66–71; Barford 2001, 79.

196 Kunstmann 1981, 67–101; Pohl 1988a, 260; Eggers 2001, 71–72, 82.

197 Moro 1963, 78–79; Baltl 1974–1975, 408; Peroche 1992, 17.

198 Fräss-Ehrfeld 1984 I, 50; Wolfram (*Conversio*), 16, 73–74; Pohl 1988a, 260; Fritze 1994, 89; Geary 1996, 160.

not received sufficient scrutiny, as no scholar seems to have wondered just how could the Byzantine diplomats reach Samo and turn him against the Avars.

As mentioned, after the gradual collapse of the Byzantine frontier on the Danube and the settlement of the Slavs in the Balkans, together with the Avar attacks until 626, Byzantium lost control of the interior, as well of Dalmatia, except some coastal cities and islands. As a consequence, contact with the areas controlled by Avars in East Central Europe became impossible from the Balkans. However, given the conflict between the Byzantine Exarchate of Ravenna and the Lombards, contact from Italy may also be excluded, since hostilities continued throughout the reigns of Phocas and Heraclius, despite the efforts of both Byzantine emperors to establish peaceful relations with Lombards.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, any roads leading from northeastern Italy to Bohemia in the early seventh century (at least up to 630) would have crossed Lower Austria and Moravia, which were inhabited by Slavs under Avar rule.²⁰⁰ Neither the Dalmatian possessions, nor the Exarchate of Ravenna could be possible footholds for a diplomatic intervention of Byzantium in Bohemia in 623.

Byzantium may have intervened indirectly, through another power, such as the Franks, irrespective of the latter's own reasons to stir trouble within the Avar khaganate. But such a scenario would imply an alliance between the Byzantines and the Franks against the Avars. There is of course evidence of diplomatic contacts between Constantinople and the Franks during Maurice's reign,²⁰¹ as well as under Phocas (602/03), when the Byzantines were able to co-opt the Franks against both Avars and Lombards.²⁰² But the idea that prior to the revolt of Samo, or before 626, Heraclius concluded an alliance with the Franks against the Avars²⁰³ is not supported by any shred of evidence. After 602/03, the next diplomatic contact between Byzantium and the Franks was in 630 when the two sides concluded the "eternal peace,"²⁰⁴ followed in 634 by

199 Jarut 1982, 56–58; Christou 1991, 158, 190; Christie 1998, 76–96.

200 See ch. 5.3.1.

201 See Lounghis 1980, 95–104; Shlosser 1994, 64–66.

202 See above, n. 127.

203 Jenkins 1962, 131; Avenarius 1974, 136; Waldmüller 1976, 319; Ditten 1978a, 129.

204 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV. 62, 226–228: Eo anno legati Dagoberti, quos ad Aeraclio imperatore direxerat, nomenibus Servatus et Paternus ad eodem revertuntur, nunciantes pacem perpetuam cum Aeraclio firmasse. Acta vero miraculi, quae ab Aeraclio factae sunt, non praetermittam; *Gesta Dagoberti*, 24, 409; Dvornik 1949, 287 (in 629); Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 231 (in 628, after the end of the Persian war); Lounghis 1980, 108; Fritze 1994, 83; Drauschke 2011, 257–258.

Heraclius request that Jews in *Francia* be baptized, a request promptly fulfilled by Dagobert I.²⁰⁵

Heraclius' only contacts with the West mentioned in the sources for the period between 610 and 623 are with the Lombards. In 611, the emperor renewed the 608 treaty with Agilulf, who made a treaty with the Franks as well.²⁰⁶ Heraclius renewed the treaty with the Lombards for second time in 612/13, and that peace lasted until 616.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, there is an indication of a Byzantine embassy to the Lombards in 623/24,²⁰⁸ and of a Visigothic embassy to Constantinople in 616.²⁰⁹ None of them, however, had anything to do with the Avars.

The evidence shows therefore that there was no interference of Byzantium, and no cooperation between the Byzantines and the Franks, in order to destabilize the Avar rule over the Slavs of Bohemia. The Byzantine sources do not provide any information on the establishment, the development, or the end of Samo's polity, while none of the Western sources mentions any relation between Byzantium and Samo during the whole period from 623 to 658, when Samo was ruling over the Wends. The revolt of Samo is associated only with the Frankish eastern policy, as it took place in an area that the Franks regarded as their sphere of influence, but which was, after all, under Avar control following the treaties of the Avars with the Franks in the second half of the sixth century.

2.7 The Last Phase of Avar Attacks (623–626)

The main events of the last phase of the Avar attacks on the Byzantine territory were the ambush against Emperor Heraclius and the siege of Constantinople by the Avars and the Persians. After an attack in Thrace, probably in 623, the Avars sought a peace treaty and Heraclius sent as negotiators the patrician Athanasius along with the quaestor Cosmas. The khagan, after assuring the envoys of his peaceful intentions, asked to negotiate with the emperor in person. The meeting place was to be Heraclea, about 60 klm to the west from Constantinople. The imperial procession headed towards the meeting place and received an unexpected attack from a contingent of the Avar cavalry. The emperor and his retinue, despite being followed by the Avars, managed

205 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV. 65, 230; *Gesta Dagoberti*, 24, 409; Lounghis 1980, 108; idem 1994, 61; Drauschke 2011, 258.

206 Andrea Dandolo, *Chronicle*, VI. 5, 91; Lounghis 1980, 105, 111; Christou 1991, 160.

207 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV. 40, 133; Lounghis 1980, 105–106, 111; Christou 1991, 160–161.

208 See ch. 5.3.1, n. 40.

209 Lounghis 1980, 106 (in 615); Kaegi 2003, 89.

to return to Constantinople without engaging in battle. The Avar contingent then plundered the outskirts of Constantinople, destroyed churches and took a large number of captives.²¹⁰

The Avar ambush is dated in the *Chronicon Paschale* to 623, while Theophanes places it in 619. As a consequence, scholars dealing with the ambush have dated the attack either to 623²¹¹ or to 619,²¹² some even to 617.²¹³ The testimony of the *Chronicon Paschale* is supported by Isidore of Seville, who mentions the ambush under the 14th year of Heraclius' reign (October 623/24), as well as the 40th year of the reign of the Frankish king Clothar II.²¹⁴ The attack against Heraclius is also mentioned, but without any date, in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*.²¹⁵ Furthermore, under the year 623, a Syriac source states that the Slavs raided the Aegean islands and their boats reached as far as Crete.²¹⁶

Despite the attempt on his life, given his decision to go to war with Persia, Heraclius had to patch relations with the Avars in order to assure his rear on the Balkans. Just one year after the ambush in Heraclea (according to Theophanes, in 620), the two sides agreed to a peace treaty, without any mention of the annual tribute amount.²¹⁷ Nikephoros, who gives no date for the treaty, places it before the campaign against the Persians and mentions that the tribute rose to 200,000 gold coins. Furthermore, Heraclius had to send hostages to the khagan in the persons of his illegitimate son John-Atalarich, his nephew Stephen, and John, an illegitimate son of patrician Bonus.²¹⁸

If one accepts the date of the ambush as indicated in the *Chronicon Paschale* (623), then the treaty must be dated to the winter of 623/24.²¹⁹ According to Walter Pohl, the treaty of 623/24 was not the first that Heraclius concluded with the Avars, but a renewal of an earlier one. Before his campaign against

210 See Synkellos, *Homily*, 10, 301; *Chronicon Paschale*, 712–713; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 301–302; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 10, 50–52.

211 Avenarius 1974, 113; Stratos 1981, 127–135; Pohl 1988a, 245–246; idem 1988b, 266; Kaegi 2003, 118–119; Curta 2006a, 76; Luttwak 2009, 104.

212 Lemerle (*Miracles* II), 101–103; Fine 1983, 42; Golden 2011a, 97.

213 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 269; Avenarius 1973, 19; Waldmüller 1976, 262; Speck 1980, 24, 42; Haldon 1990, 45; see also Ziemann 2007, 128, n. 605.

214 Isidore, *Additions*, 490, 5.

215 *Russian Primary Chronicle*, II, 85, 11.

216 Thomas Presbyter, *Chronicle*, 18; Avenarius 1973, 21; idem 1974, 111; Waldmüller 1976, 264; Pohl 1988a, 247. The Slavic attack is attributed by A. Stratos (1981, 133) to incitement of the Avar Khagan.

217 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 302; Stratos 1981, 133; Haldon 1990, 45; Luttwak 2009, 395.

218 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 13, 58; Stratos 1981, 135; Fine 1983, 42; Kaegi 2003, 120; Ziemann 2007, 128.

219 Synkellos, *Homily*, 10, 302; Stratos 1967, 371; idem 1981, 133–135; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 269 (in 622); Pohl 1988a, 247.

the Persians in 622, Heraclius has sent a letter to the Avar khagan, by which he asked him to be the protector of his son Constantine as well as to come to the assistance of the empire.²²⁰ Pohl dates the first treaty to 619/20, after the Avar attack into Thrace and the ambush in Theophanes' account. In his view, the annual tribute increased from 140,000 to 180,000 gold coins, the price that Emperor Heraclius had to pay for being able to transfer the troops from Europe to Asia for the campaign against the Persians.²²¹ The treaty of 619/20 was violated by the Avars probably in 622, when Heraclius had already begun his campaign and was forced to return to Constantinople in March 623. The negotiations with the Avars obliged Heraclius to stay in Constantinople until March 624, when he went back to the Persian frontier.²²²

The most important trial for the Byzantine Empire under Heraclius was the siege of Constantinople by the Avars and the Persians in the summer of 626. With no known details about the rapprochement between Byzantium's two enemies, the sources suggest that they had reached an agreement for simultaneous attacks from the west and from the east, respectively.²²³ The participation of the Persians in the siege of Constantinople could be seen as a diversionary movement, aimed at preventing Heraclius from advancing into Persian territory. After the victories that the emperor obtained against the Persians during the previous four years, Khusro II (591–628) found himself in a particularly difficult position. In an attempt to give the Byzantines a decisive blow, he sent through Syria a Persian army led by the general Shahrvaraz, who moved to Chalcedon, in order to support the attack of the Avars. Heraclius did not return from Armenia to defend Constantinople, but entrusted its administration to patrician Bonus, to the young Constantine III, and to Patriarch Sergius, to whom he sent instructions for the defense of the capital. The

220 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 303 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 435): He also wrote an exhortation to the Chagan of the Avars that the latter might assist the Roman state inasmuch as he had concluded a treaty of friendship with him, and he named the Chagan guardian of his son; Synkellos, *Homily*, 11, 302; Pohl 1988a, 247.

221 Pohl 1988a, 247, who considers as possible the renewal of many treaties since the era of Phocas and up to 623, on the occasion either of an emperor's rise to the throne, or because of the Avar attacks on the Balkan provinces and Thessalonica. On the treaty, see also Avenarius 1974, 114; Stratos 1981, 129; Fine 1983, 42 (in 621); Haldon 1990, 45 (in 619); According to P. Lemerle (*Miracles* 11, 103) the treaty of 620 lasted until 626.

222 Stratos 1981, 135; Kaegi 2003, 121; Luttwak 2009, 398–399.

223 See Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* (l. 197–203), 168; idem, *Heraclius* 11 (l. 96–97), 214; Synkellos, *Homily*, 46, 317; *Chronicon Paschale*, 716–717; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 315; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 13, 58; Stratos 1967, 371–372; Avenarius 1974, 115; Waldmüller 1976, 265; Pohl 1988a, 249; Fowden 1993, 35; Howard-Johnston 1995, 133; Kaegi 2003, 133–134; Luttwak 2009, 401–402; Kordoses 2011, 301.

only military force in Constantinople at that time was a cavalry contingent that, according to the *Chronicon Paschale*, was no larger than 12,000 men on horseback.²²⁴ Heraclius did not seek help from the West to defend his capital, while his alliance with the Western Turks (sometimes identified with the Khazars)²²⁵ served only for his war against the Persians.

On June 29, 626, the Avar vanguard reached the outskirts of Constantinople. On July 8, the first military conflict took place, when a part of the residents and the garrison came out of the city for supplies.²²⁶ The Byzantines sent the patrician Athanasius as an envoy to convince the khagan to retreat, but instead the khagan demanded the surrender of the city and of its residents.²²⁷ When appeared before Constantinople on July 29, the Avar army had 80,000 men, Avars, Slavs, Bulgars, and Gepids.²²⁸ Their first attack took place on July 31 between the gates of Pempton and Polyandrion, while on the next day siege engines were used for the section of the walls between the gates of Polyandrion and Saint Romanos.²²⁹ Apart from the land operations, the khagan ordered the Slavs to put at sea their dugouts (*μονόξυλα*). The Slavic fleet of dugouts then concentrated on the bridge of Saint Callinicus, which had rocks around it, thus preventing the approach of Byzantine ships.²³⁰

During those confrontations, the patrician Bonus sought new negotiations with the Avars. On August 2, he sent envoys to the khagan, who simultaneously received an embassy from the Persians. The Avar ruler, after announcing to the Byzantines that the Persians would send him 3,000 men as reinforcements,

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- 224 Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* (l. 266–301), 172–174; *Chronicon Paschale*, 718; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 303, 315; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 12, 54; Stratos 1967, 373; Waldmüller 1976, 266; Speck 1980, 44; Howard-Johnston 1995, 132–135; Kaegi 2003, 133–135.
- 225 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 315–316; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 12, 54–56; Noonan 1992, 109, 111; Scharlipp 1992, 79; Kralides 2003, 76–77; Luttwak 2009, 403–404; Kordoses 2011, 296, 300; Golden 2011a, 74; On the identification of the Western Turks with the Khazars, see Czeglédý 1983, 103–105; Balogh 2005, 187–195; Zuckermann 2007, 403–404; Howard-Johnston 2007, 167; Luttwak, *op. cit.*, 152; Golden 2011c, 224.
- 226 *Chronicon Paschale*, 717–718, has 30.000 men for the van-guard of the Avars; Stratos 1967, 372; Waldmüller 1976, 265; Pohl 1988a, 249; Howard-Johnston 1995, 138; Kaegi 2003, 135.
- 227 *Chronicon Paschale*, 718–719; Stratos 1967, 372–373; Waldmüller 1976, 265–267; Pohl 1988a, 249; Howard-Johnston 1995, 135; Kaegi 2003, 136.
- 228 Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* (l. 217–219), 170; *Chronicon Paschale*, 719; Waldmüller 1976, 267–268; Howard-Johnston 1995, 137–138; Kaegi 2003, 136; Ziemann 2007, 129; Nikolov 2017, 68.
- 229 *Chronicon Paschale*, 719–720; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 13, 58; Stratos 1967, 373; Waldmüller 1976, 268–270; Pohl 1988a, 250; Howard-Johnston 1995, 138–139; Kaegi 2003, 137; Ziemann 2007, 129.
- 230 *Chronicon Paschale*, 720–721; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 316, who states that the Slavic dugouts came to Constantinople from the Danube; Stratos 1967, 373; Waldmüller 1976, 270; Howard-Johnston 1995, 138; Kaegi 2003, 138–139; Luttwak 2009, 402.

noted that the besieged were hopeless, as Heraclius could not offer them any help. Furthermore, he asked for the surrender of Constantinople and of all belongings of the city's residents, while the people themselves were to be surrendered to the Persians. The Byzantine envoys rejected the demands of the khagan. On their way back, the three Persian envoys fell in the hands of the Byzantines, who killed two of them and sent a mutilated one back to the Avars.²³¹

Clashes continued along the walls of Constantinople between August 3 and 5, with simultaneous confrontations at sea. On August 4, probably in the evening, the Slavic dugouts began the transfer of Persian troops on the European side of the Bosphorus. The seventy Byzantine ships that sailed against them faced a strong, contrary wind and thus the Slavs reached the Asian shore with no problems. However, the 4,000 Persians who attempted to cross the Bosphorus were exterminated when the returning Slavic dugouts were intercepted by the Byzantine ships.²³² Meanwhile, the failure of a new assault of the Avars on August 6 marked the end of the land operations as well.²³³

The Avar siege ended in disaster during the naval battle of August 7, close to the Golden Horn, where the Byzantine navy destroyed the Slavic dugouts. Two different versions of what happened appear in the sources. The *Chronicon Paschale* attributes a key role to the Armenian sailors, who made a signal fire in the port of Saint Nicholas. The Slavs mistook that for a signal of the Avars and rushed into an ambush, where they were massacred. By contrast, Patriarch Nikephoros credits Bonus for the victory, particularly for intelligence gathered before the attack, which allowed the Byzantines to anticipate the moves of the Avars.²³⁴ With the failure of the siege, the Avars destroyed their war engines, and asked for negotiations with the Byzantines. Nothing is known about the outcome of those negotiations, if they ever took place. All that is known is that the khagan asked to talk with the *commercarius* Theodore, but Bonus

231 Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* (l. 328–365), 176–178; Synkellos, *Homily*, 21, 306–307; *Chronicon Paschale*, 720–724; Stratos 1967, 373; Waldmüller 1976, 270–272; Speck 1980, 44–45; Pohl 1988a, 250–252; Howard-Johnston 1995, 139–140; Kaegi 2003, 137; Ziemann 2007, 129–130; Luttwak 2009, 396.

232 Synkellos, *Homily*, 22–24, 307–308; *Chronicon Paschale*, 723; Sebeos, *Armenian History*, 1, 38, 123, 79; Stratos 1967, 373–374; Waldmüller 1976, 271–272; Pohl 1988a, 252; Howard-Johnston 1995, 140; Kaegi 2003, 137; Luttwak 2009, 402.

233 Synkellos, *Homily*, 24, 308; Stratos 1967, 374; Waldmüller 1976, 273; Pohl 1988a, 253; Kaegi 2003, 137.

234 *Chronicon Paschale*, 724; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 13, 58–60; Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* (l. 409–494), 182–188; idem, *Heraclias* 11 (l. 73–78), 214; Synkellos, *Homily*, 32–33, 310–311; Stratos 1967, 374; Waldmüller 1976, 272–274; Speck 1980, 30, 50–51; Pohl 1988a, 253; Howard-Johnston 1995, 140–141; Kaegi 2003, 137; Luttwak 2009, 402–403; Hurbanić 2017, 82–88, who rejects the credibility of Nikephoros' testimony.

suggested instead Theodore, brother of Heraclius, who was approaching with his army Constantinople.²³⁵

The failure of the Avars to take Constantinople put a definitive end to the Byzantine-Avar hostilities, which had created so many problems in the Balkans over almost sixty years (568–626). However, the defeat of the Avars and their withdrawal to the lands north of the Danube did not result in the restoration of Byzantine rule in the region. According to a disputed testimony, Heraclius founded Nicopolis ad Istrum in commemoration of his victory over the Persians. Veselin Beshevliev believed that to have in celebration of a victory over the Avars on the Danube,²³⁶ but the trustworthiness of the information cannot be confirmed and is likely related to the oral tradition. For such a case we may also assume regarding the testimony of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus about the Byzantine general of Belgrade in Heraclius' era who handled the settlement of the Serbs. Some have interpreted that testimony as an indication of the restoration of Byzantine control on the Danube, after the defeat of the Avars in 626 but others believe that the entire story is the emperor's fabrication.²³⁷ At any rate, judging from the information provided by the same author and the evidence from other sources, as well as the relevant archaeological finds, during the reign of Heraclius the Byzantine control in the Balkans extended only to the coastal areas facing the Adriatic and the Black Sea.²³⁸

235 See Pohl 1988a, 254–255; Howard-Johnston 1995, 141; Kaegi 2003, 137–138; Ziemann 2007, 130.

236 Ranzanus, *Epitome*, 557, Index 2: paulatim ad aestinam ortum, instar pelagi, tacitus perfluit, multis in locis flectitur, saepeque terras vel perumpens, vel altius submovens, ad Nicopolim tandem evadit, oppidum Heraclii Imperatoris victoria, et morte filii Cosdruae, Regis Persarum nobile; Beševliev 1969, 495.

237 DAI, 32, 152: But when they had crossed the river Danube, they changed their minds and sent a request to the emperor Heraclius, through the military governor then holding Belgrade, that he would grant them other land to settle in; Lilie 1985, 24–28, 31–42, who identifies Belegradon with the Dalmatian city Biograd/Zara vecchia and considers it as the center of the Byzantine administration in Dalmatia after the fall of Salona; Ferjancić 1995, 152; see also below, ch. 3.2, n. 52.

238 Lilie 1985, 17–20, 42–43; Curta 2001a, 106–107; Madgearu 2007, 267; Somogyi 2008a, 364; Liebeschuetz 2015, 459–460.

The Byzantine-Avar Relations after 626

3.1 The Testimonies of the Sources

The evidence of the Byzantine, as well as Syriac and Latin sources on the Byzantine-Avar relations is particularly strong for the period between 558 and 626. After the siege of Constantinople in 626, there is a mention of only two Byzantine embassies to the Avars in 634/35 and of Avar envoys to Constantinople in 678. The Avars were now restricted to the area north of the Danube and their historical life in Central Europe is known mainly from the archeological evidence and the Carolingian sources.

The defeat of the Avars in 626 also caused internal conflicts that weakened the political and military power of the Khaganate. The first consequence of their failure was the struggle between the Avars and the subjugated Slavs, which, according to George Pisides and the *Chronicon Paschale*, broke up just after the catastrophe of the Slavic fleet of dugouts.¹ A few years later, in 631/32, the disruptive movements within the Avar khaganate intensified, as the strong Bulgar element disputed the Avar rule, and a civil war resulted from that, threatening the cohesion of the Khaganate. According to Fredegarius, the leader of the Bulgars Alciocus rose up and claimed a leader role for his people, taking advantage of the Avars' weakening after the defeat at Constantinople. After the military clash between Avars and Bulgars, the defeated Alciocus fled from Pannonia together with 9,000 Bulgars and asked the king of the Franks Dagobert I for asylum. Dagobert, although initially allowing the Bulgars to spend the winter in Bavaria, later ordered them to be slaughtered. Alciocus managed to escape together with 700 men, who first went to the "Wendish March", which was located somewhere in Slovenia and Carinthia, where they were offered shelter by the local Slavic ruler named Walluc.² The Lombard king

1 Pisides, *In restitutionem Crucis* 244 (l. 78–81); *Chronicon Paschale*, 724 (Whitby, 178): A few other Slavs who had escaped by diving, and who came out in the region where the godless Chagan was positioned, were slain at his injunction; *ibidem*, 725 (Whitby, 179): Some people said that the Slavs, when they saw what had happened, withdrew and retreated, and for this reason the cursed Chagan was also forced to retreat and follow them; Waldmüller 1976, 282; Ditten 1978a, 128; Speck 1980, 31; Fine 1983, 43, 49; Pohl 1988a, 254–255; Curta 2001a, 109; *idem* 2006a, 76; Ziemann 2007, 130.

2 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV, 72, 242: Quod protinus a Baiovaries est impletum; nec quisquam ex illis remansit Bulgaris, nisitantum Alciocus cum septinientis viris et uxoris cum liberis,

Grimoald (662–671) later (ca. 663) settled this small Bulgar population, headed by Alzeco, *Vulgarum dux*, between Isernia, Sepinum, and Bovianum, under the authority of the duke of Benevento, Romuald.³ However, Paul the Deacon's story about the settlement of the Bulgars in Italy has nothing in common with Patriarch Nikephoros' and Theophanes' information about the migration of the fifth son of Kubrat, after the collapse of the "Great Bulgaria" namely that the latter settled in Pentapolis of Ravenna under the Byzantine, not Lombard rule.⁴

The Avars are first mentioned in the Byzantine sources after 626 in relation to two embassies that arrived, one after the other, in *Avaria* in 634/35, in order to liberate, offering presents and money, three Byzantine noblemen, who had been held hostages by the Avars since 623.⁵ The Avars appear again in the sources in 678, when an embassy showed up in Constantinople, along with others from the West, to congratulate the emperor on his victory over the Arabs. On that occasion, the Avars presumably concluded a treaty with Constantine IV (668–685).⁶ According to Theophanes, the Avars met envoys of various other kings in Western Europe and Emperor Constantine IV offered

qui in marca Vinedorum salvatus est. Post haec cum Walluchum ducem Winedorum annis plurimis vixit cum suis; Waldmüller 1976, 282–283, 301–302; Bóna 1981, 105–106; Fritze 1982, 66; Wolfram 1985, 130–131 (in 636); idem 1987, 95, 341–342; Pohl 1988a, 268–269 (in 635/36); Geary 2002, 168; Ziemann 2007, 131–132; Štih 2010, 97–98, 115; Sophoulis 2012, 120; Nikolov 2017, 68–70.

- 3 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, v. 29, 154; Christie 1998, 98; Ziemann 2007, 132–133; Štih 2010, 98. Nikolov 2017, 70. On the problem of the identification of Alciocus (Fredeggar) with Alzeco (Paul the Deacon), see Beševliev 1970, 294; Ditten 1978a, 130 (n. 2); Pohl 1988a, 269–270; Ziemann 2007, 133–134; Sophoulis 2012, 107; For the possibility that *Alciocus* was a title, not a name, see Ziemann, *op. cit.*, 131–132.
- 4 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 35, 88: The fifth established himself in the Pentapolis of Ravenna and became tributary of the Romans; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 357; Horedt 1987, 15; Ziemann 2007, 134, 143.
- 5 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 21, 70: At the same time Maria, the sister of Herakleios, sent money to the Chagan of the Avars and ransomed her son Stephen. Pleased with such gifts, the Avar <chief> urged Anianos the magister that he, too, should send gifts and ransom the other hostages he was holding; which, indeed, was done; Pohl 1988a, 246, 272–273; Martindale 1992, 3A, 82 and 3B, 1196–1197; see also above, ch. 2.7, n. 218.
- 6 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 34, 86; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 356 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 496): When the inhabitants of the West had learnt of this, namely the Chagan of the Avars as well as the kings, chieftains, and castaldi who lived beyond them, and the princes of the western nations, they sent ambassadors and gifts to the emperor, requesting that peace and friendship should be confirmed with them. The emperor acceded to their demands and ratified an imperial peace with them also. Thus great security prevailed in both East and West; Ditten 1978a, 127, 132; Avenarius 1985, 1022; Pohl 1988a, 278; Christou 1991, 220–222; Lutwak 2009, 215.

to all of them the so-called “despotic peace.”⁷ However, the Avars were most likely not included in that group, as they were not integrated into the Christian *oikoumene*. Indeed, their Christianization took place more than a century later.

The last reference to Avars in the Byzantine sources concerns the early ninth century, i.e. a part of the Avars who are said to have been subjugated by the Bulgars after the campaign of Krum east of the Tisza River in 803/04.⁸ Those Avars, already in decline before their subjugation,⁹ constituted part of the Krum’s army and participated in the utter defeat of the Byzantines in 811,¹⁰ as well as in Krum’s preparations for the siege of Constantinople in 814.¹¹ However, much like with Samo’s revolt, two more disruptive movements are said to have taken place during the reign of Heraclius on the periphery of the Avar Khaganate. Some scholars have associated both to the policy of the Byzantine emperor towards the Avars. One of those movements concerns the migration of the Croats and the Serbs from the Central Europe to the Balkans, while the other refers to the revolt of Kubrat, leader of the Onogur Bulgars, in the area north of the Sea of Azov.

3.2 The Settlement of the Croats and the Serbs on the Balkans

The migration of the Croats and the Serbs from Central Europe to the Balkans is related to the weakening of the Avar khaganate after 626. It is quite probable that the two peoples escaped from Avar domination before migrating to the south.¹² By contrast, it is unlikely that Byzantium had anything to do with

7 See Leontsini 2006, 232–240.

8 See Váczy 1972, 395–397; Pohl 1988a, 198; Ziemann 2007, 310–311; Sophoulis 2012, 123; Niko-
lov 2017, 71.

9 *Suda lexicon* I, B 423, 483–484; ibidem, A 18, 4; Pohl 1988a, 198; Szöke 1990–1991, 147.

10 *Chronique byzantine*, 212/13; Λαβόντες οὖν οἱ Βούλγαροι εὐκαιρίαν καὶ θεασάμενοι ἐκ τῶν ὀρέων ὅτι περιεφέροντο πλανώμενοι, μισθωσάμενοι Ἀβάρους καὶ τὰς πέριξ Σκλαβηνίας; Zie-
mann 2007, 255; Sophoulis 2012, 123, 126, 181–182, 210; On the Boulgarian expedition of
Nikephoros in 811, see Obolensky 1971, 67; Kyriakes 1993, 105; Ziemann 2007, 247–263; Sop-
houlis, op. cit., 192–216.

11 Symeon Magister, *Chronography*, 11, 617: Λοιπὸν οὖν μετὰ ταῦτα ἀνηγγέλλη αὐτῶν λεγόντων
ὅτι ὁ Κροῦμος ἐστράτευσεν λαὸν πολλὸν συναθροίσας καὶ τοὺς Ἀβάρεις καὶ πάσας τὰς Σκλαβηνίας;
Scriptor Incertus, 347; Kyriakes 1993, 116; Ziemann 2007, 284; Sophoulis 2012, 123, 181, 221,
261.

12 Ditten 1978b, 519; Fine 1983, 55; Gazi 1993, 16; No impact had the old view of Franz Martin
Pelzel (1774, 27), that the Croats shook off Samo’s rule. On the views about the Croatian
ethnogenesis, often linked with the Avar khaganate, see Pohl 1989, 211–223; Brunnbauer
2006, 43–48; Borri 2011, 219, 230.

their revolt¹³ given the geopolitical situation at that time.¹⁴ The only source pertaining to that migration and the subsequent settlement in the Western Balkans is that of the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the mid-tenth century, namely more than three centuries after the events.¹⁵ According to Porphyrogenitus, the Croats and Serbs migrated to areas “devastated by the Avars” during the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610–641), and *terminus post quem* accepted by most scholars is the year 626.¹⁶ One has to note that many historians have denied the Slavic character of the two tribes, while claiming their Iranian or, in the case of the Croats, even Germanic origin.¹⁷

Revising the issue of the Croat migration, Lujo Margetić and Nada Klaić have advanced the idea of re-dating it to the late eighth or early ninth century, in association to the Avar-Frankish wars and the collapse of the Avar khaganate. A major argument in that reconsideration is the radical change in the material culture of Croatia after 775, when various finds of Carolingian type make their appearance in burial assemblages.¹⁸ In Croatia, the first written evidence of a ruler comes from the charter of duke Trpimir (Trepimirus, c. 842–864), in which he presented himself as a *dux Chroatorum*, ruling over the *regnum Chroatorum*. However, most scholars regard as the first undisputable testimony of that title the inscription mentioning *dux Cruatorum* Branimir (Branimirus, 879–892) which was found in the church of Šopot.¹⁹

13 Luttwak 2009, 61.

14 See above, ch. 2.6.

15 Borri 2011, 204–205; Budak 2012, 52–53; On the DAI and the possible sources of Porphyrogenitus on our topic, see Živković 2010a, 17–24; Dzino 2010, 104–117; Borri, op. cit., 207–209, 222–228. On the sources about the Croats in Central and Eastern Europe see Pohl 1985, 294; idem 1989, 218.

16 DAI, 31, 146–148: These same Croats arrived to claim the protection of the emperor of the Romans Heraclius before the Serbs claimed the protection of the same emperor Heraclius ...; ibidem, 32, 152; Popović 1975, 504; Fine 1983, 56; Ferluga 1984, 51; Pohl 1989, 217; Borri 2011, 211. On further views concerning the time of their descent, see Jenkins 1962, 117, 124, 131; Peroche 1992, 17, 35.

17 See Dvornik 1949, 273–276; Peroche 1992, 16; Katičić 1999, 159–164. On the origin of the Croatian and the Serbian ethnonym, see Grégoire 1944–1945, 88–118; Kunstmann 1982, 131–136; Katičić 1985, 309; Pohl 1988a, 262–263. On the identification of the name “Croats” with a social class or a title in the Avar khaganate see Pohl 1985, 297–298; idem 1989, 220.

18 Klaić 1975, 36–39, 133–140; eadem 1984, 253–270; Margetić 1977, 5–88, who disputed the Slavic origins of the Croats, considering them as descendants of Kubrat or Kuver’s people; Katičić 1985, 309. For the material culture in early medieval Croatia, see Dzino 2010, 52ff.

19 Katicic 1985, 307; Pohl 1985, 294; idem 1988a, 264; idem 1989, 217–218; Budak 1990, 129; idem 2015, 38–39; Peroche 1992, 22; Gazi 1993, 24; Dzino 2010, 175, 196–197.

The theory of a later Croatian migration had some influence in Croatian scholarship,²⁰ but most scholars accepted it with caution. Walter Pohl points out that, although covering the two dark centuries in the history of the Croats, that theory has no basis in the written sources and, also, the case of an “empty land” in the Western Balkans at the end of the eighth century seems unlikely. However, he assumes that the Croatian ethnogenesis took place in two phases, correlating the latter with the collapse of the Avar khaganate, and considers it outcome of the mixture of the migrated Croats with the settled in Dalmatia Slavs.²¹ According to Hans Ditten and Ralph-Johannes Lilie, the Byzantines were politically active in the Balkans between 628, the year in which Heraclius ended his Persian war, and 634, when the Arabs began their attacks on the Byzantine territory.²² Under the assumption that events in the Balkans were linked to developments in the East, the two German scholars believe that Byzantium had a key role in the migration of the Croats and the Serbs, an idea that has been strongly disputed by others. On the other hand, Tibor Živković proposed that the source for Constantine VII’s account of the early history of the Croats and the Serbs, was a text which he dated to ca. 877/78 and called (rather arbitrarily) *De conversione Croatorum et Serborum*, under the assumption that it must have been similar to the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*.²³ There is, however, no evidence for such a source.

That the homeland of the Croats is called in the *De administrando imperio* *great* or *unbaptized* is the result of a peculiar Byzantine concept of the world, particularly of territories outside the empire and inhabited by pagan peoples (e.g. Great Bulgaria or Moravia). Ever since Late Antiquity, *minor* defined a territory within the empire that is part of the Christian *oikoumenē* (e.g. Gothia or Scythia Minor).²⁴ The homeland of the *unbaptized* or *White Croats*²⁵ in Central Europe is located by different scholars in different areas, such as Silesia and Little Poland,²⁶ Galicia,²⁷ Bohemia,²⁸ or a wider area that includes Galicia,

20 The approach of Lujo Margetić and Nada Klaić followed scholars as Neven Budak, Mladen Ančić and Vladimir Sokol; see Dzino 2010, 44–48, 179–182.

21 See Katičić 1985, 310; Wolfram 1989, 12; Pohl 1985, 293–294; idem 1988a, 262–263; idem 1989, 211, 218, 222–223.

22 Ditten 1978a, 131–132; Lilie 1985, 23.

23 Živković 2010a, 26–36; idem 2010b, 117–131; see also his monograph, 2012. A critical approach of T. Živković point of view in Dzino 2010, 106.

24 Dostálová 1966, 346; Wolfram 1989, 8–9; Pohl 1988a, 267; idem 1989 222; Belke and Soustal 1995, 171, n. 362; Vachkova 2008, 345.

25 DAI, 30, 142; ibidem, 31, 146; on the symbolisms of the colors, see Borri 2011, 220–221.

26 Lewicki 1965, 476; Peroche 1992, 17; Gazi 1993, 16.

27 Vernadsky 1945, 257–258.

28 Chaloupecký 1950, 232; Jenkins 1962, 116; Waldmüller 1976, 306.

Silesia, and eastern Bohemia.²⁹ Attempts to place *White Croatia* in Carinthia³⁰ seem to ignore that, according to the *De administrando imperio*, the unbaptized Croats had as neighbors the *unbaptized Serbs*.³¹ Scholars have located the *unbaptized* (or *White*) *Serbia* either in Lusatia, between the rivers Elba, Oder and Saale, thus equating the *White Serbs* with the Sorabi/Sorbs mentioned in later sources, descendants of which still live in Saxony and Brandenburg (the Sorbs of Lusatia),³² or in Polish and Czech Silesia,³³ as well as in Bohemia.³⁴ Vistula (most likely its upper course in southern Poland) is mentioned in the *De administrando imperio* as the homeland of the Serbian tribe of Zachlumi-ans, who settled in what is now Herzegovina.³⁵

According to the Byzantine emperor, a part of the *White Croats*, under the leadership of seven tribal chieftains (five brothers and two sisters), left its homeland and headed southwards.³⁶ Some believe that they took an "eastern route," along the rivers Prut and Siret towards the Lower Danube, then to Thrace,³⁷ while others prefer a "western route" through Moravia, Lower Austria, and western Hungary.³⁸ Similarly, an eastern³⁹ and a western route⁴⁰ have been proposed for the Serbian migration. Both for Croats and Serbs, the western route seems the most plausible, taking into account the distance between the homeland and that of the settlement. The Croats occupied the area of the Slavonic plain between the rivers Sava and Drava, as well as the mountain region of Illyrian Croatia, along the coastline of the Adriatic and close to the Byzantine coastal cities. To the south, their limits reached the mouth of the river

29 Eklblom 1941, 132; Dvornik 1949, 270, 285–286; idem 1970, 36; Obolensky 1971, 59; Avenarius 1974, 141; on the homeland of the Croats, see also Kunstmann 1984, 111–112; Borri 2011, 216–218.

30 Kronsteiner 1978, 141–144; Kunstmann 1984, 117–119.

31 DAI, 32, 152; Belke and Soustal 1995, 172.

32 *Annales Einhardi*, 163: Interea regi adlatum est, quod Sorabi Sclavi, qui campos inter Albim et Salam interiacentes incolunt ... *Descriptio civitatum*, 2: Iuxta illos est regio, quae vocatur Surbi, in qua regione plures sunt, quae habent civitates L; ibidem, 18; Eklblom 1941, 132; Dvornik 1949, 270, 285; idem 1970, 36; Jenkins 1962, 130; Obolensky 1971, 59. Fritze 1982, 75–77; Borri 2011, 214.

33 Ferjancić 1995, 152.

34 Živković 2010b, 121.

35 DAI, 33, 160–162; Jenkins 1962, 139; Belke and Soustal 1995, 179–180.

36 DAI, 30, 142: From them split off a family of five brothers, Kloukas and Lobelos and Kosentzis and Mouchlo and Chrobatos, and two sisters, Touga and Bouga, who came with their folk to Dalmatia and found the Avars in possession of that land; Borri 2011, 212.

37 Jenkins 1962, 117.

38 Waldmüller 1976, 306–307; Gazi 1993, 16.

39 Jenkins 1962, 131–132.

40 Lilie 1985, 29–30.

Cetina, and to the east the rivers Vrbas and Kupa. To the north, they reached the rivers Lasa and Labin in Istria, while they held control of the part of Lower Pannonia between the Sava and the Danube.⁴¹

Regarding the migration of the Croats and Serbs in the Balkans, Constantine VII emphasizes the active role of Emperor Heraclius, while mentioning the Croats being victorious in a war against the Avars. A significant number of scholars believe this information to reflect the true historical context of settlement in the Balkans, which must have taken place with the consent (or permission or by command) of Heraclius, and under the authority of Constantinople.⁴²

Emperor Constantine VII has two different versions of the Croat migration and settlement which must have originated from two independent sources. According to that in chapter 30, when the Croats reached Dalmatia, they defeated the Avars and settled in the area without any involvement of the Byzantine Empire.⁴³ Other scholars, however, favor the version in chapter 31, according to which the Croats first came in contact with Heraclius, who ordered them to fight the Avars, and then allowed them to settle in the land that they had occupied.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it is believed the Croats and the Serbs to have been either imperial tributaries,⁴⁵ or bound to the empire by means of a *foedus*.⁴⁶ The information in chapter 30 is most probably based on the Croatian oral tradition, while that in chapter 31 reflects the “official” Byzantine version of history. Irrespective of their narrative goals, both versions aimed to present a Croatian *origo gentis* (origins of a nation). To such an attempt, the Byzantine Emperor constructed a mythological background, based on the popular oral tradition, which covered the migration from *White Croatia*, the victory over the Avars and the settlement in former Roman territory south of the Danube during the reign of Heraclius. These parameters constituted the necessary frame for the Croatian ethnogenesis and the development of their hegemony.⁴⁷

41 DAI, 30, 142; ibidem, 144–146; Jenkins 1962, 123, 129; Peroche 1992, 17–18; Gazi 1993, 16; Ferjancić 1995, 153; Luttwak 2009, 164; Štih 2010, 152; Borri 2011, 211.

42 Jenkins 1962, 124; Katičić 1985, 310–311; Budak 1990, 130; Živković 2010b, 121.

43 DAI, 30, 142; Ditten 1978a, 129; Ferjancić 1995, 151–152.

44 DAI, 31, 148: And so, by command of the emperor Heraclius these same Croats defeated and expelled the Avars from those parts, and by mandate of Heraclius the emperor they settled down in that same country of the Avars, where they now dwell; Fine 1983, 54; Katičić 1985, 309; Peroche 1992, 17, 35; Goldstein 1999, 170; Luttwak 2009, 164; Živković 2010b, 121.

45 Gazi 1993, 16.

46 Ferluga 1984, 51; Katicic 1985, 309–311.

47 Avenarius 1974, 140–144; Fine 1983, 53–54, 58; Pohl 1985, 293–296; idem 1989, 212, 220; Katičić 1985, 308; idem 1999, 150–151; Geary 2002, 166; Borri 2011, 209–211; Budak 2012,

The nomadic traditions regarding numbers and symbolisms in Porphyrogenitus' account about the Croats have been pointed out by Walter Pohl.⁴⁸ Francesco Borri has submitted the mythological background in the narration of the Croats' migration from White Croatia to Dalmatia to a closer examination. According to the Italian scholar, Constantine Porphyrogenitus used a passage from Herodote about an embassy from the lands north of the Danube to the Adriatic. That embassy was made of seven *Hyperboreans* – five men and two women.⁴⁹ The mythological background is further enhanced by the names given to the leaders of the Croatian migration. In order to name one of the Croatian brothers *Chrovatos*, an anthroponym derived from the ethnonym *Chrovatoi*, Constantine VII drew on a Scythian ethnogenetical myth, where the name of the king Skolotos became an ethnonym for the Scythians. On the other hand, the Byzantine emperor may have used earlier Byzantine authors dealing with the migration of Bulgar tribes.⁵⁰ According to Borri, "the strategy used by tenth-century historians in order to explain the origins and the oldest history of the northern barbarians was the creation of a mythical founding hero.... Constantine, using heterogeneous material, interpreted it through the schemes of ancient and medieval Greek ethnography, an *interpretatio graeca* based on tradition and myths of origins".⁵¹

On the other hand, Constantine VII claims that Heraclius settled the Serbs in the region of Serbia, west of Thessalonica. The Serbs wished to return to their homeland, but, upon reaching the Danube, they decided to return and to remain within the limits of the Empire. The Serbs sought land for settlement through the Byzantine general of Belgrade, and Heraclius granted them lands in the Western Balkans: "what is now Serbia and Paganian and the so-called country of the Zachlumi and Terbounia and the country of the Kanaklites." The story about the Serbs inside the Empire obviously reflect a Byzantine viewpoint, and the emperor even plays on the meaning of their name, supposedly translated as "slaves," to point out that the Serbs needed the permission of Heraclius for their settlement. Contrary to the story of the Croats, there is no mention of a clash between Serbs and Avars, nor any separate, conflicting traditions that would preserve elements of a Serbian *origo gentis*.⁵²

52–53, who claims that the description of Porphyrogenitus concerns only the Dalmatian Croats.

48 Pohl 1985, 294–297; idem 1989, 218–221.

49 Herodote, *Histories*, IV.33, 230–232; Borri 2011, 224.

50 Herodote, *Histories*, IV.6, 204; Borri 2011, 224–226, 229; see also Obrušánszky 2009, 28–29.

51 Borri 2011, 224, 226–227.

52 On the Serbian migration see DAI, 32, 152–154; Jenkins 1962, 131–133, according to whom the leader of the Serbs migrating towards the Balkans was the brother of Dervan, ruler of

The Serbs settled to the southeast of the Croats, in the area surrounded by the rivers Drina, Morava, Cetina, Ibar, Tara, Lim, Uvac, Raska and Piva. The center of their settlement was the area of Rascia.⁵³ Porphyrogenitus also refers to other smaller tribes (Zachlumi, Terbouniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians, and Pagani/Arentani), who occupied portions close to the Adriatic coast, particularly in modern Herzegovina and Montenegro.⁵⁴ Except the Diocletians, all these tribes are said to be Serbian, which implies that the actual area of Serbian settlement was even larger.⁵⁵

According also to Constantine VII, the era of Heraclius was the initial stage for the Christianization of the Croats and the Serbs. The Byzantine emperor asked for missionaries from Rome, supposedly the first mission to the Slavs on which the emperor cooperated with the pope.⁵⁶ Some scholars accepted that testimony at face value (even with a limited impact of the Christianization),⁵⁷ while others rejected it as inaccurate, for the baptism of the Croats took place in the ninth century with Frankish, not Roman missionaries.⁵⁸

The dependence upon Constantinople of the two peoples and the other mentioned tribes in the Balkans⁵⁹ has been rightly disputed, mainly because of the ideological background and the political purpose of the information recorded by the Byzantine Emperor in order to “prove” the dominion of

the Sorbs and ally of Samo; Avenarius 1974, 143. Maksimović 1982, 25–32; Fine 1983, 52; Lilie 1985, 26; Pohl 1988a, 267; idem 1989, 221; Ferjancić 1995, 152; Belke and Soustal 1995, 173, n. 367; Luttwak 2009, 164–165; Živković 2010b, 121; The assumption of Francis Dvornik (1949, 287 and 1970, 65–66), that the Serbs helped the Croats in their war against the Avars, should be ruled out, as Porphyrogenitus makes no mention of any clash between Serbs and Avars. On views about the Serbian ethnogenesis, see Brunnbauer 2006, 48–49.

53 DAI, 30, 146; ibidem, 32, 160; Jenkins 1962, 134; Fine 1983, 53.

54 DAI 33–36, 160–164; Jenkins 1962, 137, 140–142; Pohl 1989, 221; Belke and Soustal 1995, 180, 183, n. 392, 402; Budak 1990, 129–130, who assumes that the settlement's limits of these tribes were determined by Byzantium; Živković 2010a, 17.

55 Ferluga 1984, 50; Ferjancić 1995, 153–154; Živković 2010a, 22–23; idem 2010b, 121; Reservations on this view: Jenkins 1962, 139, 142; Pohl 1988a, 268; Budak 1990, 131–133.

56 DAI, 31, 149: The emperor Heraclius sent and brought priests from Rome, and made of them an archbishop and a bishop and elders and deacons, and baptized the Croats; ibidem, 32, 155: and the emperor brought elders from Rome and baptized them [the Serbs] ...; Waldmüller 1976, 308–310; Živković 2010a, 22, 26; Dzino 2010, 201–202, 206.

57 Waldmüller 1976, 313, 377; Živković 2010b, 121.

58 Pohl 1989, 221; see also Dzino 2010, 203, where the supporters of the two views.

59 DAI, 29, 124: Since the reign of Heraclius, emperor of the Romans, as will be related in the narrative concerning the Croats and Serbs, the whole of Dalmatia and the nations about it, such as Croats, Serbs, Zachlumi, Terbouniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians, and Arentani, who are also called Pagani [they were subject to the emperor of the Romans]; ibidem, 30–36, 138–164; Belke and Soustal 1995, 145, 168, 173, 178–182.

Constantinople over the region ever since the era of Heraclius.⁶⁰ One may also assume that Constantine VII created a myth in order to consolidate the Empire's claims of rule over the Croats and the Serbs, by making Heraclius give them the land, the permission to settle, the alliance against the Avars and the opportunity to convert to Christianity.⁶¹ On the other hand, the story in chapter 30, which is more "favorable" to the Croats is likely related to the Byzantine-Croatian rapprochement against the tenth-century Bulgarian expansion into the Western Balkans.⁶² According to another point of view, the credibility of the account of the Croatian migration must be rejected, because it is an entirely literary construction based on the settlement of "Scythian barbarians," even though Constantine VII, for the political reasons mentioned above, never mentioned the Croats as "Scythians."⁶³

The political and ideological dimension of the information given by Constantine VII raises doubts about the credibility of his narrative in chapter 31, particularly in regards to the involvement of Heraclius in the conflict between the Croats and the Avars. Taking into account the geopolitical situation during the reign of Heraclius, we may accept that no indication exists of any organized Balkan policy, neither before nor after the Persian wars⁶⁴ as well as the Byzantine Empire could not prevent the settlement of the Croats and Serbs, and was thus obliged to maintain good relations with them.⁶⁵ Although the clash between the Croats and the Avars, which is mentioned both in chapters 30 and 31, may have truly taken place, the version of events given in chapter 30, where there is no mention of the empire's involvement, appears to be the more reliable. Therefore, there was no "permission" or "consent" that Emperor Heraclius supposedly gave for the settlement of the Croats, the Serbs and other tribes in the Western Balkans, as Byzantium was in no position to prevent that migration at that specific moment, whether by diplomacy or by war.

Leaving aside Heraclius' intervention, the story about the migration of the Serbs, particularly their peaceful settlement, appears to be quite probable as they settled far from the Avars, in sharp contrast to the Croats, who occupied the lands on the south-western borders of the Khaganate. On the other hand, regarding the Byzantine-Avar political relations, the Serbs and the Croats could not have been approached by Constantinople before their actual settlement, which Heraclius had to turn to his own advantage. Despite the defeat of

60 Ferluga 1985, 12–16; Katičić 1999, 156.

61 Pohl 1988a, 266; idem 1989, 221–222.

62 Budak 2012, 53.

63 Borri 2011, 207, 231.

64 Lilie 1985, 43.

65 Fine 1983, 54–55; Haldon 1990, 47.

626 and the serious crisis that followed within the Khaganate, the threat of a possible return of the Avars to the Balkans never subsided. Approaching and integrating the Croats and Serbs into the Byzantine sphere of influence could offer Constantinople the opportunity to create a buffer against possible Avar attacks in the Western Balkans, and thus to protect its dominions in Dalmatia.⁶⁶

3.3 The Revolt of Kubrat

Another episode associated with movements of peoples against the Avars during the reign of Heraclius is the revolt of Kubrat, the khagan of the Onogur Bulgars. According to Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople, Kubrat freed the Onogurs from Avar rule. His success made room for a union of the Bulgar tribes and the rise of the so-called “Great Bulgaria” centered upon the region around the Sea of Azov, later expanding into the steppe lands between the rivers Dnieper, Don and Kuban. Furthermore, having already liberated his people from the Avar rule, Kubrat sent an embassy to Constantinople. Heraclius concluded an alliance with him, which lasted until 641, and bestowed upon him the title of patrician, along with rich presents.⁶⁷ The Kubrat’s revolt, which has been dated variously to 630,⁶⁸ 635,⁶⁹ or between 635 and 641,⁷⁰ was also believed to be the result of Emperor Heraclius’ policy against the Avars, in other words a reflection of an active involvement of Constantinople in the world of

66 The role of a buffer against the Avars that the Croats and Serbs may have played was also accepted by Andreas Stratos (1967, 376) and Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova (1976, 67).

67 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 22, 70/1: At about the same time Koubratos, the nephew of Organas and lord of the Onogundurs, rose up against the Chagan of the Avars and, after abusing the army he had from the latter, drove them out of his land. He sent an embassy to Herakleios and concluded a peace treaty which they observed until the end of their lives. Herakleios sent him gifts and honored him with the title of patrician; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 356–357; Czeglédy 1983, 103, 109; Róna-Tas 2000, 3; Ziemann 2007, 144–146; Vachkova 2008, 343–344; Luttwak 2009, 172; Golden 2011b, 145; Sophoulis 2012, 89, 105–106; Some scholars as S. Alexandrowna-Pletnewa (1978, 28–29), D. Ovčarov (1987, 175) and V. Gjuzelev (1996, 3, 11) believe that Phanagoria, on the Taman peninsula, was the capital of Great Bulgaria. That idea was effectively debunked by Viktor N. Chkhaidze 2012, 14–22.

68 Gjuzelev 1996, 10; Haldon 1990, 47; Bálint 1996, 229–230; Róna-Tas 2000, 6 (between 630 and 634).

69 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 159; Beševliev 1981, 149; Bóna 1981, 107; Werner 1984b, 64; Pohl 1988a, 271–272; Kyriakes 1993, 47–48; Golden 2011b, 145; idem 2015, 353.

70 Dvornik 1970, 67; Ditten 1978a, 128.

the steppe lands.⁷¹ Shortly after Kubrat's death, which took place at some point during the reign of Constans II (641–668), his polity collapsed because of inner conflicts, as well as the attacks of the Khazars.⁷²

In attempt to secure the imperial influence in the steppe lands, Heraclius may have approached the Onogurs already during the first decade of his reign. In 619, the Onogur ruler Orhan visited Constantinople together with his young nephew Kubrat, and they were both baptized. Orhan received the title of patrician, while Kubrat remained at the Byzantine court for a while.⁷³ Kubrat appears a typical Byzantine client in the region north of the Caucasus Mountains. His alliance with Constantinople was a very important achievement of the Byzantine diplomacy at the time when the Empire had to deal with Arabs on the eastern frontier, and had effectively lost control over the greatest part of the Balkans. Byzantium gained a powerful and trustworthy ally in the steppe lands and the alliance with Kubrat would have repercussions for relations with the Bulgars after their settlement in the Balkans.⁷⁴

The alliance of Byzantium with Kubrat is illustrated by a very important burial assemblage, which accidentally came to light in 1912 in Malo Pereshchepyne, near Poltava (northeastern Ukraine). The assemblage, which Joachim Werner attributed to Kubrat, included golden and silver jewelry, weapons, harness and symbols of political power. Among the latter are two golden arm rings, a golden chain, a golden buckle, and the hilt of a sword decorated with gems arranged in the shape of a cross. According to Werner, all those finds are of Byzantine origin, and should therefore be regarded as material correlates of Kubrat's title of patrician. The most important argument in favor of his assumption is the monogram deciphered as *Kubrat [the] patrician* engraved on the bezels of two of three golden finger-rings found in the burial

71 Ditten 1978a, 128; Lemerle (*Miracles* II), 185–186; Beševliev 1981, 149; Fine 1983, 43–44, 48–49; Kyriakes 1993, 47–48; Luttwak 2009, 172; Sophoulis 2011, 400; Golden 2011b, 144; idem 2015, 353.

72 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 35, 88; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 357–358; Beševliev 1981, 153; Noonan 1992, 124; Róna-Tas 2000, 6–7; Zuckermann 2007, 419, 428; Golden 2011b, 145; idem 2011c, 237; idem 2015, 353.

73 John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, 120. 47, 197; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 9, 48–50; Werner 1984b, 64; Pohl 1988a, 215, 271 (in 620); Kyriakes 1993, 48–49, n. 8; Kralides 2003, 76; Ziemann 2007, 145–146, where the discussion about the identification of Kubrat with the Kurt in the katalog of Protobulgar rulers; Vachkova 2008, 344; Luttwak 2009, 172–173; Golden 2011b, 144–145, and 2015, 353, where also the discussion about the origin of Kuvrat and Organas. On the identification of Ketrades in John of Nikiu's account with Kubrat, an idea on which the theory is based, according to which Kubrat was Orhan's nephew, see Mingazov 2012.

74 See Kyriakes 1993, 50, 161–162; Golden 2011b, 145.

(ring A: XOBPATOY and ring C: XOBPATOY ΠΑΤΡΙΚΙΟΥ). In addition, there were 68 Byzantine solidi, the latest being 18 pieces struck for Constans II between 642 and 647, which offer a *terminus post quem* for the assemblage.⁷⁵ Despite reservations,⁷⁶ the assemblage seems to confirm Werner's interpretation of the grave as being that of Kubrat, the leader of the Onogur Bulgars.

One of the most important finds in Malo Pereshchepyne is a silver tray with a stamp of Emperor Anastasius (491–518) and a Christogram surrounded by an inscription that reads “ex antiquis renovatum est per Paternum reverentiss(imum) episc(opum) [nostrum amen].” Paternus mentioned in this inscription was bishop of Tomis between 498 and 520. The tray is further decorated with four crosses, with tendrils and vines, deer and peacock, all images associated with the heavens and with the Eucharist. Another tray has a depiction of a cross and stamps of Emperor Heraclius, while a bowl for hand-washing (trulla) is dated to the end of the sixth century by means of a stamp of Emperor Maurice.⁷⁷

The main question regarding Kubrat's revolt is the identity of the people against whom he revolted. With only the *Short History* of Patriarch Nikephoros as a source for that, scholars have accepted the idea that Kubrat shook off the Avar rule, and established the Khaganate of “Great Bulgaria” with Byzantine support. However, that interpretation has in turn been rejected by scholars who, scrutinizing the events in the steppe lands during the second half of the sixth and the early seventh century, concluded that Kubrat revolted against the Western Turks.⁷⁸

According to Menander the Guardsman, between 558 and 562 the Avars defeated a series of peoples, such as the Onogurs, the Sabir Huns, the Zaloi, and the Antes. Having subordinated them, the Avars moved westwards in 561/62, followed by some of those peoples.⁷⁹ The situation in the steppe lands during the period following the westward migration of the Avars is known from the report of the embassy of Zemarchos, who return to Constantinople in 571, after staying two years among the Turks. On his way back, Zemarchos reached the

75 Werner 1984a; idem 1984b, 66–68; Kiss 1991, 120; Róna-Tas 2000, 3–6; Fiedler 2008b, 152; Luttwak 2009, 172; Sophoulis 2012, 106; Bollók 2017, 427.

76 Bálint, 1980–1981, 137; idem 1984, 263–268; idem 2008, 33; Pohl 1988a, 272; Zalesskaya 1996, 218; Aibabin 2006, 47–60, who attributes the treasure to the Khazars; idem 2011, 158. Ziemann 2007, 146–148; on the date of the grave, see also Gavrituhin 2006, 13–16.

77 Werner 1984a, 10–11; Bálint 1989, 98; Aibabin 2006, 53–54; Ziemann 2007, 146; Kardaras 2012, 81; Born 2012, 64.

78 Avenarius 1974, 155; Alexandrowna-Pletnewa 1978, 28; Czeglédy 1983, 39; Ovčarov 1987, 175; Pohl 1988a, 273; Gjuzelev 1996, 10.

79 See above, ch. 1.1.

Lower Volga, where an Onogur leader was ruling in the name of the Turkish khagan Sizabul.⁸⁰ Later, in 576, the khagan of the Western Turks Turxanthus, along with the Utigur leader Anagaeus occupied the Byzantine city of Bosphorus (nowadays Kerch) in the Crimea.⁸¹ Judging from Menander, after the migration of the Avars, the Western Turks imposed likely between 567 and 576 their supremacy in the lands between the Volga, the Don and the northern Caucasus and ruled over the Onogurs, the Alans and other tribes until the revolt of Kubrat.⁸² Also, in 584 the threat of the Western Turks on the Avars made the latter abandon the siege of Anchialos and withdraw to Sirmium.⁸³ Moreover, the Western Turks, who controlled the roads to the Caucasus, invaded Persarmenia in 627 and 628 through the Caspian Gates, in support of Heraclius, who at that time was waging war against the Persians.⁸⁴ Regardless of the Turks, some have rightfully noted that the Avars must have found impossible the control from the Carpathian Basin such a remote area as that around the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov in c. 635, taking into account the inner problems the Avars faced at this moment.⁸⁵ Even earlier, the Avar campaign in 602 concerned the Western Antes, allies of Byzantium, settled possibly close to Dinogetia at the Lower Danube, and not the main Antic settlements in the forest-steppe zone of Ukraine.⁸⁶ In short, judging from the evidence of the written sources pertaining to the Eurasian nomads after 561/62, the year of the westward migration of the Avars, nothing indicates that they could have had any influence in the lands by the Caucasus Mountains and around the Sea of Azov. Rulers of that area were the Western Turks, who had subjugated the local Bulgar and Iranian tribes. As a consequence, Kubrat revolted against Turkic, and not Avar rule.

80 Menander, *History*, fr. 10. 4, 124: Then they came to the Ugurs, who told them that in a wooden area by the river Kopphen ... The leader of the Ugurs, who maintained Sizabul's authority there; Czeglédy 1983, 39, 106–109; Ziemann 2007, 68; Golden 2011b, 142.

81 See ch. 1.4, n. 78.

82 Menander, *History*, fr. 19. 1, 174–176: Consider, wretches, the Alan nation and also the tribe of the Unigurs. Full of confidence and trusting in their own strength they faced the invincible might of the Turks. But their hopes were dashed, and so they are our subjects and are numbered amongst our slaves; Czeglédy 1983, 106, 109; Ovčarov 1987, 175; Pohl 1988a, 40, 66, who points out that the rule of the Turks on a part of the Utigurs and other Bulgar tribes that did not follow the Avars to Pannonia does not justify the demand of the Avars to Justin II on the bestowal of the annual tribute that those tribes had earlier received from Byzantium (See ch. 1.3, n. 48–49); Gjuzeev 1996, 9; Harmatta 2000, 250–252; Ziemann 2007, 79, 102; Golden 2011a, 73; idem 2015, 352–353.

83 See ch. 2.1, n. 7.

84 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 315–316; Stratos 1967, 376; Kralides 2003, 78–81; Kaegi 2003, 142–145; Zuckermann 2007, 404–417.

85 Avenarius 1974, 156–157; Pohl 1988a, 273.

86 See ch. 2.4, n. 99.

Walter Pohl has pointed out that Nikephoros' testimony on the revolt of Kubrat's Onogurs against the Avars is in contradiction with what is known to have happened in the Carpathian Basin during the reign of Heraclius. The Byzantine Patriarch must have misunderstood the situation, given that a little earlier the Bulgars of Alciocus had revolted against the Avars. Nikephoros, in other words, mistook the Bulgars in the Carpathian Basin with those in the steppe lands.⁸⁷ The revolt may also be anachronism in Nikephoros' narrative, for, after the subjugation of the Onogurs and other nomadic peoples to the Avars between 558 and 562, some of them followed the Avars to Pannonia. But allowing Kubrat to revolt against the Western Turks undercuts the logic of the diplomatic approach of the Onogurs from the policy of Heraclius towards the Avar khaganate. That approach did not target the Avars, but aimed at controlling the crucial "steppe corridor,"⁸⁸ which the Byzantines tried to secure through their alliance with the recently baptized Christian ruler of the Onogurs.

87 Pohl 1988a, 273. Nikephoros' testimony is also judged as wrong by Alexander Avenarius (1974, 157).

88 On the term, see Sophoulis 2012, 116.

The Archaeological Finds on the Byzantine-Avar Relations

4.1 Early Avar Period I (568–626/30)

Besides the written sources, very important for the examination of the Byzantine-Avar relations are the archeological finds in the area of the Khaganate. According to some estimates, there are no less than 60,000 Avar-age graves¹ so far found in modern Hungary and Slovakia, in addition to parts of Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Austria, and the Czech Republic. Remains of Avar culture have also been found in Germany² and Poland.³ The two centuries and a half of Avar history (568–822) are divided archaeologically into three periods, Early, Middle, and Late, the exact demarcation and chronology of which varies from one author to another.⁴ Some have even discerned two historical periods, corresponding to the so-called First and Second Avar khaganates, separated chronologically at the beginning of the Middle Avar period, likely c. 660/70.⁵

Multiple influences have been detected in the archeological record of the Early Avar period, from Central Asia, the Black Sea region, Byzantium and the Merovingian West. Besides Avars, the people who settled in Pannonia in 568 comprised different ethnic groups. They were mostly bearers of the steppe culture and are largely responsible for the cultural diversity of the Khaganate. As in previous centuries, in the sixth century the steppe lands in Eastern Europe and the Carpathian Basin constituted a relatively unified cultural space, where nomadic peoples developed a multi-ethnic culture, with the contribution of Byzantine influences. Avar settlements have produced evidence of late antique culture, but also of material remains that archaeologists associated with both Germanic and the Slavic tribes. However, by the mid-seventh century, those multi-sided influences observed in the early material culture of the Khaganate began to disappear, making room for the gradual formation

1 See ADAM; Stadler 2008, 52.

2 Eger and Biermann 2009, 137–170.

3 Zoll-Adamikowa 1992, 297–315; Poleski 1992, 317–322; Rudnicki 2009, 233–249.

4 See Garam 1987, 191–197; Bálint 1989, 150, 170; idem 2008, 39–61; Martin 1989, 76, n. 21; Daim 1996a, 199–201; Vida 1999, 189; Gavrituchin 2008, 73, 75–76; Heinrich-Tamáska and Syrbe 2016, 24–25.

5 See Čilinská 1967, 447–454; Vinski 1971, 392; Gavrituchin 2008, 76.

of a homogeneous Avar culture, characteristic of the Late Avar period.⁶ In the Early Avar period, the local Romance traditions are visible mostly in the areas of Keszthely and Pécs, as well as other in areas of central and eastern Pannonia,⁷ while the survival of Germanic populations is testified primarily in certain Gepidic cemeteries.⁸ “Burial communities” of local groups may be observed after 600, as earlier the Avars did not bury their dead in row-grave cemeteries.⁹ A peculiar burial custom of the Avar era were the inhumation pits with so-called “tunnel-shaped” shafts, into which the body of the deceased was placed.¹⁰

The Central Asian elements of the early Avar culture may be traced primarily to the horseman graves, in which horses were often buried together with the harness (bridle, saddle and stirrups), while the man was accompanied in death by his belt and weapons (reflex bow, three-edged arrowheads in a quiver, leaf-shaped lance heads, single-edge swords in scabbards with P- or D-shaped suspension mounts), in addition to artifacts of daily use.¹¹ Next to Central Asian features one can observe decorative elements from the Black Sea region, with which the Avars became familiar during their contact with the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs prior to their migration to Central Europe (some of those tribes also followed the Avars to the Carpathian Basin). The most important decorative element of Black Sea origin is the use of precious metals for belt mounts and harness straps. Those mounts were often made of silver sheet and decorated either with symbols or with geometric motifs.¹² Furthermore, the rich “princely burials” that appear in the Early Avar period are interpreted as evidence of the social stratification in the Khaganate.¹³

A prominent place among artifacts from Avar-age sites is occupied by metal objects, primarily belt mounts and strap ends, which, in their majority, are

6 Daim 1998, 82–84; idem 2001, 146; idem 2003, 488–489; Vida 1999, 191; idem 2008, 17, 39–41; idem 2016, 261, 265–266; Gavrituchin 2008, 71; Stadler 2008, 65; Heinrich-Tamáska 2016d, 273–277; Heinrich-Tamáska and Syrbe 2016, 33; Adrienn Blay and Levente Samu (2016, 291–310) attempt to distinguish the terms “Byzantine” and “Mediterranean” in relation to the cultural influences of the Early Avar period. In doing so, they do not seem to take sufficiently into account the territorial extent, as well as the cultural background of the early Byzantine state.

7 Vida 2008, 31, 35–39.

8 Stadler 2008, 65–73; Vida 2008, 18–29, 39; Stanciu 2008, 416–424; On the Lombard cultural remains, see Barbiera 2008, 403–413; Koncz 2015, 315–340.

9 Vida 2016, 254.

10 Daim 1998, 82; idem 2003, 487.

11 Vinski 1971, 392; Bálint 1980–1981, 132; Garam 1990, 253–259; Daim 2003, 486–487; Vida 2008, 15–16; idem 2016, 256; Tóth Zoltán 2013, 237–242.

12 Vinski 1971, 392; Bálint 1980–1981, 132–134; Golden 2011b, 144.

13 Vida 2008, 29; Heinrich-Tamáska 2011, 89–110.

made in the pressing technique during the Early Avar period, and by casting from the Middle Avar period onwards. Metalworking, on the other hand, is very well documented archaeologically through craftsmen burials and the excavated workshops. Furthermore, various inlay techniques were in use, niello, damascening, or stone and glass inserts. The latter includes artefacts decorated either with cell work (*cloisonné*) or both single and detached settings (*cabochons*). Avar craftsmen also employed surface elaboration and glazing. The finds of the Early Avar period testify to strong technological influences from Byzantium and, in the second place, from the Merovingian area.¹⁴

The ornamentation of men's belts had great significance for the Avars, because social status and power were displayed through that element of the attire, e.g. the golden belt.¹⁵ In male burials of the Early Avar period, belt fittings were mostly made of pressed gold, silver, or bronze sheets, either undecorated or with repoussé decoration. Byzantine decorative patterns appear: the shield-, double shield- and crescent- shape sheets, adorned mostly with spirals. Various other motifs also occur on the secondary strap ends, such as Christian symbols. Common are also geometric motifs, especially the interlaced stripe and the dot decoration. The granulation is more limited and occurs on the luxury, gold belt fittings.¹⁶ The belt buckles were mainly made of iron or bronze. Burial assemblages also produced evidence of cast, silver and bronze buckles with heart-, lyre-, cross-shaped, or triangular plates of the *Sucidava*, *Salona-Histria*, *Syracuse*, *Corinth*, *Bologna-Balgota*, or *Keszthely-Pécs* types. These buckle types are of Byzantine origin,¹⁷ since almost identical specimens have been found in many areas of the Byzantine world.¹⁸ Avar-age female burials have produced many gold, silver or bronze earrings, the pendants of which are half crescent, spherical or pyramid-shaped, and decorated with granulation, necklaces made of glass beads with eye-shaped inlays, and bracelets of golden or silver sheet with funnel-shaped ends. Apart from jewelry, assemblages in female burials also include cosmetical instruments and needle cases made of bone. The Byzantine influences are particularly evident in goldsmithing techniques for the

14 See Garam 2001; Heinrich-Tamáska 2005; eadem 2006; eadem 2008a, 237–261; eadem 2016d, 280.

15 Dekan 1972, 323–324; Daim 1998, 86–87, 90; idem 2010, 61; Miklós-Szőke 2008, 178, 181; Vida, 2009, 249; Szenthe 2016, 356.

16 Dekan 1972, 323–329; Garam 1987, 194; eadem 1996, 258; eadem 2001, 113–157; Bálint 1989, 152–153; Martin 1989, 65–90; Vida and Pasztor 1996, 342, 344–345 (fig. 5. 265–271); Andrási 2000, 67–76; Bálint 2008, 55; Gavrituchin 2008, 73.

17 Štefanovičová 1980, 444; Varsik 1992, 77–90, 99–103 (tab. 1–5); Garam 1992, 153; eadem 2001, 88–113; Stadler 2008, 64–65; Vida 2009, 249–251.

18 See Schultze-Dörrlamm 2002 and 2009; Kazanski 2003, 35–47; Poulou-Papadimitriou 2005, 687–704 (702, fig. 1–12).

production of jewelry and belt sets, which have good analogies within the vast area between the Black Sea and the Middle Danube. That is particularly the case of the golden earrings with pyramid-shape pendants, golden bracelets, and belt sets with the granulated decoration.¹⁹

Glass beads with eye-shaped inlays or bullet-shaped beads, most typical for the Early Avar period have many analogies in sixth-century assemblages in Eastern Europe. Byzantine are believed to be the double-conical beads with monochromatic, wavy lines or the beads made of precious stones. Several other beads show western or northern influences.²⁰ During the Early Avar period II (626/30–660), new bead types appeared, such as dark green or blue bullet-shaped beads, as well as prismatic, carnelian beads. The Byzantine influence during the Middle Avar period is visible in the appearance and great popularity of melon-seed-shaped glass beads.²¹

The cultural patterns of Late Antiquity and early Byzantium had a considerable role in the development of the Avar crafts, particularly in the ornamental repertoire of dress accessories, since the Avars adapted many elements of the Byzantine art to their own culture. Besides for the activity of local workshops, some of the artifacts found in Avar-age assemblages may well have been made by Byzantine craftsmen inside the Khaganate. Authentically Byzantine objects (“imports”), which had a representative role for the Avar elite, may be found as well, such as coins, amphorae, belt sets, buckles, earrings, and crosses, obtained by means of diplomatic gifts, trade or as booty after raids.²²

The Avars may have become familiar with some decorative elements of Byzantine origin even before their migration to the Carpathian Basin. For example, the mask-shaped belt mounts have good analogies in sixth-century assemblages in the Black Sea region and the Ciscaucasia, which include so-called Martynovka mounts.²³ The same is true for mounts featuring human faces rendered with a dotted line.²⁴ Decorations of Aradac (or Fölnak/Felnac)

19 Vinski 1971, 393; Garam 1987, 194–195; eadem 1992, 148–152; eadem 2001, 15–51, 65–72; Bálint 1989, 152–153 (fig. 63); Vida 2009, 244; Heinrich-Tamáska 2016d, 281–285, 289–290, who considers the half crescent earrings imported from Byzantium. On the early Byzantine jewelry and belts, see Geroulanou 1999.

20 Pásztor 2008, 313–316.

21 Ibidem, 316–318.

22 Pohl 1988a, 90; Bálint 1989, 156; Daim 2000, 78; idem 2003, 469; Vida 2009, 244; Bühler 2010, 213–234.

23 Bálint 1992, 411; Garam 2001, 124–130; Daim 2001, 145; idem 2003, 469–470, 477–478, 528 (t. 2, 1–3); idem 2010, 64; Balogh 2014, 37–53; Rácz 2014, 57–59. On the analogies between certain brooches found in the Carpathian Basin with those in the Middle Dnieper, see Stadler 2008, 65; Szmoniewski 2008, 275–278, 286.

24 Garam 2001, 130–133; Daim 2003, 493; Bárdos and Garam 2009, no. 621; Rácz 2014, 50–52.

type also appear during the first half of the seventh century. In that case, the belt fittings are decorated with trefoil as well as “dot-comma” motifs, both of which are demonstrably of Byzantine origin.²⁵ Of particular interest are the ornaments of the Kunágota-Mersin type, with strap ends bearing Christian symbols or monograms, replaced by geometric decoration on later specimens. The golden strap end found in a horseman burial in Novi Kneževac (Vojvodina, Serbia) has monogram that may be deciphered as APEΘOY (the genitive form of the name Arethas).²⁶

Specific pottery forms found in Early Avar assemblages, particularly hand-made pottery (e.g., pots with funnel-shaped neck or square opening), have clear analogies in Central Asia, Southern Siberia and the East European steppe lands. The late antique and Germanic traditions in pottery production may be observed on the basis of the wheel-made black and grey wares, as well as stamped decoration. A large number of ceramic forms are associated in one way or another with Byzantium. Such forms as flasks, amphorae, wine jugs (with or without spout), jugs, deep plates with inward-turning rim, one-handle cups, and particular types of cooking ware probably originated from the northern Balkans. They were imitated in both wheel- and handmade forms by Avar potters. The few amphorae found inside the Carpathian Basin are dated in the sixth or seventh centuries, while the gray ware jugs with combed decoration are probably an imitation of provincial Byzantine pottery of the seventh century. Based on typology and technique, authentically Byzantine must be the amphorae, the wine jugs, and the flasks, all categories of pottery that appear in high status burials. Most other “Byzantine” forms of pottery are likely imitations of late antique and early Byzantine forms and ornaments.²⁷

Byzantine finds already appear in assemblages of the Early Avar period. For example, regarding the phase I, the horseman burial in Kunszentmárton (eastern Hungary) includes many trade implements. Inside a purse secured with small straps and a Byzantine buckle of the Pápa type was a folding scale with nine weights for precious metals or coins. The weights, which have inscriptions or monograms indicating a Byzantine officer, e.g. a prefect (*Pr[e]fecti Atanasi*), are dated before the mid- seventh century and were probably plundered from some site in the Balkans. The same burial assemblage produced a belt decorated with a “dot-comma” motif.²⁸

25 Garam 2001, 115–119; Daim 2003, 470–471; idem 2010, 64; Kazanski 2003, 47; Bárdos and Garam 2009, no. 1377; Rácz 2014, 39–42; see also Koncz and Gábor 2016, 145–156.

26 Bálint 1989, 156; Garam 2001, 77–78, 123; Daim 2003, 471.

27 Bálint 1989, 178; Vida 1992, 517–529; idem 1999, 33–83, 88–147, 155–166, 175–188; Garam 2001, 166–176; Daim 2003, 480–481; Herold 2014, 212–215.

28 Pohl 1988a, 194; Garam 2001, 110, 119–123, 160–163; Daim 2003, 478–480, 532 (tab. 6).

Several artifacts of Byzantine origin are also known from grave 108 in the cemetery A in Kölked-Feketekapu (southern Hungary). Prominent among them is the pair of gold earrings with crescent-shaped pendant, the bronze disc fibula, two pins, and a folding iron chair, with inlaid silver decorations. Numerous buckles of the Sucidava, Syracuse, Salona-Histria, and Pápa types have a clearly Byzantine origin.²⁹ At Zamárdi (western Hungary), the greatest cemetery of the Early Avar age known so far (ca. 6,000 graves), iron, folding chairs similar to those from Kölked-Feketekapu have been found in five burials. Of an equally Byzantine origin (or at least influence) are the earrings with bead-shaped pendant found in Zamárdi, a number of vessels of bronze or glass, the strap ends with geometric or interlaced motifs, etc.³⁰

Some of the most important cemeteries of the Avar age have been found in Keszthely, at the western end of Lake Balaton. In and around Keszthely, no less than 19 different sites have been found, which produced evidence of the so-called “Keszthely culture,” a quite heterogeneous mixture of cultural elements. South of the present-day town, next to the mouth of the Zala River, which flows into Lake Balaton, was a late Roman fortress (Keszthely-Fenékpuszt), which had been destroyed in the fourth, but then rebuilt in the second half of the fifth century. Inside the fortress, where was living a likely autonomous Romance community, 22 stone buildings came to light, among them an early Christian basilica and a warehouse. At some point after 568, a great new basilica was built on the site. During the civil war between the Avars and the Bulgars in 631/32 (see below), the Christian population of Keszthely sided with the latter. The fort was burned, and the early Christian basilica destroyed, but part of the population survived in an isolated position throughout the Middle and the Late Avar period.³¹ After 630, Avar groups settled in the area and the flow of artifacts of western origin petered out. A notable increase in population may

29 Kiss 1996; Martin 1996, 345–361; Garam 2001, 19ff.; Vida 2008, 17; Stadler 2008, 68, 73; Gavrituchin 2008, 63–67, who considers Kölked-Feketekapu A the link between the Early and Middle Avar period.

30 Pohl 1988a, 93; Garam 2001, 23–25, 75–78, 131ff., 172–175; Stadler 2008, 67–68; Bárdos and Garam 2009, indicative: gr. no. 82, 91, 153, 439, 458, 488, 1254, 1490 (earrings)· no. 221, 367, 488 (glass vessels)· no. 153 (belt with geometric motifs)· no. 91, 216, 468, 621, 1377 (belts with interlaced stripes)· no. 82, 91, 121, 153, 157, 216, 221, 367, 468, 488, 1402 (beads)· no. 121, 565, 1049 (iron seats)· no. 193 (belt decoration with inlaid stone)· no. 193 (Byzantine buckle)· no. 565, 621, 1254 (figures of animals)· no. 1377 (coat of arms).

31 Kiss 1984, 161–201, esp. 164–170; idem 2008, 265–273; Müller 1992, 279; idem 1996a, 91–95; idem 1996b, 265; idem 2010; Daim 2003, 474–475; Vida 2008, 29, 31, 38; Heinrich-Tamáska 2008b, 431–438; eadem 1010a, 99–111; eadem 2010b, 99–122; eadem 2016b; eadem 2016c, 291–306.

be noted in the Late Avar period, together with the disappearance of several Avar decorative elements.³²

The archeological material of Keszthely shows the significance of the region during the time of both Lombard, and later Avar rule. Keszthely was at the junction of important roads leading to the Italian peninsula and to southern Germany, two regions from which many cultural influences reached the western end of Lake Balaton. The Keszthely culture represents primarily the traditions of the local Romance population, which survived during the Avar period and was receptive to influences from the Byzantine world.³³ Another view considers Keszthely as an “island culture,” formed in a foreign milieu and playing the role of a cultural bridge between the nomadic traditions of East European origin and the local traditions of Central and Southeast European character.³⁴ Considering the material culture of the Romance population in Keszthely, a plausible distinction is that between the remaining native provincials with Western Mediterranean connections (earrings with basket-shaped pendants, disc brooches with Christian motifs, bird- and animal-shaped brooches) and a population with Eastern Mediterranean connections, who came from the Balkans to Pannonia at the beginning of the Avar age as prisoners of war (pins with a bird-shaped head, the Yassi Ada-type buckles and the Byzantine brooches with inverted foot).³⁵

Characteristic Byzantine artifacts in Keszthely are, among others, the female dress accessories: silver earrings (with crescent – or basket-shape, and trapezoidal pendants with spiral decoration), S-shaped or disc fibulae, often with Christian imagery, bracelets with ends in the shape of snake heads, pins (such as that with a prism-shaped head, decorated with semiprecious stones and the inscription BONOSA), necklaces of precious metals and golden rings with encased gems.³⁶ The contacts with distant parts of the Empire are confirmed by finds of clay flasks with the image of Saint Menas, which were made in Egypt and were used by pilgrims for the transportation of holy water. Two specimens have been dated to the early seventh century and thus coincide in time with disc fibulae from southwestern Hungary that bear religious images.³⁷

32 Kiss 2008, 273–276; Vida 2008, 38; Heinrich-Tamáska 2008b, 438–444.

33 Tóth Elvira 1976, 107–120; Pohl 1988a, 191–192, 232–233; Garam 1993, 110–118; Daim 2003, 474–475; Curta 2005, 184; Vida 2008, 30–39.

34 Vida 2008, 32.

35 Vida 2009, 239–255. For the transfer of populations in the Avar khaganate, see ch. 5.1.

36 Garam 1993, 118; eadem 1996, 258; eadem 1999–2000, 381; Müller 1992, 276; idem 1996b, 265–270 (fig. 5.109–126); Daim 2003, 475, 531 (tab. 5); Vida 2008, 30; idem 2011, 397–442; On the numerous Byzantine objects in Keszthely, see also Garam 2001, 15ff.

37 Curta 2005, 184; idem 2011, 304–305, 313.

The numerous Avar-age finds obtained from Byzantium or made after Byzantine models contribute to the understanding of the Byzantine cultural influences on the Avars and, more broadly, of their relations. The interpretation of those finds is easier for the Early Avar period I, since during that time Byzantine objects could have been obtained by means of looting in the course of Avar raids into the Balkan provinces of the Empire, or as presents that entered the Khaganate with Byzantine or the Avar diplomatic missions. This is particularly the case of belt sets³⁸ and of the Byzantine pottery.³⁹ Byzantine sources mention that Avar envoys to Constantinople took advantage of their presence there to buy Byzantine artifacts as well as weapons.⁴⁰ Menander the Guardsman mentions the presents that Baian demanded after the siege of Sirmium in 568.⁴¹ Of special importance were the silk garments either offered to the Avars as presents or purchased by them in Constantinople.⁴² Others may have entered the Carpathian Basin e.g. as part of the annual tribute paid in kind.⁴³

Byzantine envoys coming to the Khaganate were likely sometimes accompanied by craftsmen, some of whom remained there to work for the Avar elites, in the process transferring their skill and techniques to the Avar craftsmen.⁴⁴ Also worth mentioning is the transfer of “know-how” from Byzantium to the Avars, as when the khagan Baian asked Justin II to send him craftsmen to build a luxurious home and baths, but who were later used for the construction of a bridge over the Danube.⁴⁵ As noted above, apart from the direct contacts between Byzantium and the Avars from 558 to 626, some elements of the Byzantine culture became known to the latter during their short stay in the area north of the Black Sea, before the migration to Central Europe.

38 Daim 2000, 187–188; idem 2001, 155–165; On the presents of the Byzantine embassies, see Chrysos 1992, 25–39; Muthesius 1992, 237–248; Lounghis 1994, 49–67.

39 Pohl 1988a, 184; Garam 1996, 258; Vida 1996, 363; idem 1999, 178.

40 See ch. 1.1, n. 23.

41 See ch. 1.3, n. 45. On the Avar claims to gold, silver and precious stones, see also *Suda lexicon* III, A 522, 270; Bálint 1992, 411. Pohl 1988a, 180.

42 See ch. 1.1, n. 2, 23 and 1.3, n. 63–65; Pohl 1988a, 180, 212; Nechaeva 2014, 182; see also Nikephoros, *Short History*, 10, 50: ... he also brought along splendid vestments for him (the Chagan) and his companions.

43 Menander, *History*, fr. 25. 2, 226 (Blockley): The envoy continued that the Khagan was satisfied with the gifts sent each year to him by the Emperor; for gold, silver and silken clothes were valuable commodities; see also above, ch. 2.1, n. 1; Pohl 1988a, 180, 195.

44 Štefanovičová 1996, 275; Garam 1996, 258.

45 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 24, 247–248.

4.2 Early Avar Period II (626/30–660)

While for the early Avar period I, archaeological finds are a complement to the written sources, for all the other periods they represent the main basis for the reconstruction of Byzantine-Avar relations. Many of the Byzantine objects that appear in Avar cemeteries are dated back to the late part of the Early Avar period, and thus coincide with the inner crisis of the Khaganate. Most important among them are luxury belt-sets. The grave of a horseman (no. 64) discovered in Gyenesdiás, two klm to the northeast from Keszthely, included golden jewelry, a Byzantine buckle of the Sucidava type, a belt with gilded bronze mounts, a sword with golden scabbard mounts, and a coin struck for Constans II between 654 and 659.⁴⁶ Equally important is the gold belt fittings from another horseman grave discovered in Kunágota (eastern Hungary), which were decorated with the “dot-comma” motif. Although the belt was found together with a *solidus* of Emperor Justinian, most scholars date the assemblage to the second quarter of the seventh century (625–650) on the basis of the associated finds. Furthermore, the luxury scabbard of the horseman's sword was decorated with pressed golden sheet with scenes of a Bacchic procession. The same assemblage included fragments of a Byzantine necklace.⁴⁷ The richest of all such assemblages is the so-called “khagan's grave” from Kunbábony (eastern Hungary), which is also dated to the second quarter of the seventh century. Inside it, archaeologists found a large, 53-liter Byzantine amphora, a gold Byzantine buckle of the Keszthely-Pécs type, two gold earrings, and a gold ring with a semiprecious stone.⁴⁸ The fragmentary silver plate found in Tépe is also of Byzantine origin.⁴⁹ Of particular interest is the so-called “double belt” from Bócsa, decorated with pseudo-buckles and round fittings. A curious detail about that belt is that it lacks the buckle, much like other belts with golden mounts and pseudo-buckles, such as found in Kunágota, Tépe, and, later, Ozora, or simpler belts of Avar horsemen. The absence of the buckle in cases of belt deposition in the grave has been noted elsewhere in Central Asia and Western Europe.⁵⁰

46 Müller 1996c, 411. idem 2008, 282–283, dating the grave to the Middle Avar period; Garam 2001, 30, 81, 94; Daim 2003, 491–492, 551 (tab. 25); Miklós-Szőke 2008, 187.

47 Garam 1991, 159; eadem 1992, 153–154, 157; eadem 2001, 43, 121–123; Daim 2003, 482, 533 (tab. 7, 1–2); idem 2010, 63–66; Bollók and Szenthe 2018, 57–82, who date the grave in 635/50–670/75 and associate it with the Bócsa and Kunbábony assemblages, as well as the Ozora assemblage of the Middle Avar period (see below, n. 73).

48 Varsik 1992, 86; Tóth Elvira 1996, 391–404; Daim 2003, 482, 545–548 (tab. 19–22); Garam 2001, 84–89, 167–168; Csiky and Magyar-Hárshegyi 2015, 175–177.

49 Garam 2001, 173; Daim 2003, 482.

50 Miklós-Szőke 2008, 182–191; Daim 2010, 64; On the – possible – eastern origin of the pseudo-buckles (decorative fittings of pure gold in the shape of buckles, sometimes

The crisis of the Avar khaganate after 626 does not seem to be associated with any particular changes in culture, art, or burial customs. Such changes are visible, however, after ca. 670, most likely as a consequence of the sedentization of the population. The end of the full of plundering expeditions and the inflow of gold from Byzantium changed the inner balance of the Khaganate. The subsequent shift to sedentary life (and the growing importance of arable farming) caused the transformation of part of the warrior group into farmers and the outbreak of social conflicts. The adaptation to a new way of life led to the development of a stable settlement network both in the centre and on the periphery of the Avar khaganate. The new conditions are also observed in the use of certain vessel types, such as the baking lids, clay pans and cauldrons. However, judging from the archaeological evidence, the ruling class of the Avars does not seem to have been seriously affected by the broader political, social and economic crisis.⁵¹

The end of the Early Avar period coincides with a recovery of the Khaganate (which continued during the Middle Avar period), although the Avars were not receiving any annual tribute from Constantinople any more. That is the era of the first “princely graves” discovered in Bócsa, Kunbábony and Tépe, all assemblages rich in golden objects.⁵² As Tivadar Vida has noted, despite the fact that Byzantium was the “great enemy” of the Avars, there was a greater degree of *imitatio imperii* during the seventh century, especially if one takes into consideration the display of power and social status, as well as the decorative styles favoured by Avar elites. “The belts were decorated with golden pseudo-buckle mounts often set with precious stones such as the ones from Bócsa, Tépe and Kunbábony, while multi-piece belts were fitted with shield-shaped mounts as the one from Kunágota”.⁵³

4.3 Middle Avar Period (660–710)

The Middle Avar period marks the beginning of the Second Avar khaganate, which is characterized by changes in population and material culture. What caused those changes is a matter of dispute. Some believe that responsible

with glass – or precious stone inlay), see Daim 2003, 482–483 (the Volga-Kama region); Gavrituchin 2008, 78–79, 83 (Turkic origin).

51 Pohl 1988a, 282, 286; Daim 2003, 481, 483; Vida 2016, 253, 256, 261–265.

52 Daim 2003, 469, 481; Bálint 2006, 147–159; Vida 2016, 256; Heinrich-Tamáska 2016b; eadem 2016d, 285–290, who considers the pseudo-buckle sets of that period local products on Byzantine patterns; Bollók and Szenthe 2018, 77–78.

53 Vida 2016, 258–260.

for them is a migration of Onogur Bulgars from the steppe lands ca. 660/70.⁵⁴ Other reject the idea and link the new material culture to internal transformations taking place in the Khaganate (along with the Mediterranean influences), and point to the continuity between the cultural phenomena of the Early and Middle Avar periods.⁵⁵ There is also another view which advocates a compromise between those two positions and admits the contribution of both factors.⁵⁶

In the Middle Avar period, the Avar culture began to expand to many areas in Central Europe, no doubt as a consequence of the expansion of the Avar populations to the north and to the west, into the area of modern Slovakia and Austria. During the eighth century, the area of the Avar settlement reached its greatest expansion. The limits of the Avar settlement are the basin of Vienna and the foothills of the Eastern Alps to the west, Slovakia to the north, Transylvania to the east, and the lands along the Danube and Drava all the way to Zagreb, to the south. The core area of the Khaganate was in the Hungarian plain.⁵⁷ The Onogur Bulgars enriched the demographical and cultural background of the Khaganate and were gradually assimilated into the local population.⁵⁸ They were most likely related to the Avars, at least from an anthropological point of view, for the skeletal material from cemeteries dated to the Middle Avar period show typically central Asiatic features.⁵⁹

In the early 660s, the after-shocks of the inner crisis must have been passé and with the consolidation of the Khaganate came new military operations.

54 Horedt 1987, 20; Garam 1987, 196–197; Bóna 1988, 454–455; Bálint 1989, 169–175 (his older view); Somogyi 2008b, 144–145, who dates the migration between 674 and 681, taking into account the numismatic finds; For the migration, see Nikephoros, *Short History*, 35, 88; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 357 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 498): ... The fourth and fifth [sons] went over the river Istros, that is the Danube: the former became subject of the Chagan of the Avars in Avar Pannonia and remained there with his army, whereas the latter reached the Pentapolis, which is near Ravenna, and accepted allegiance to the Christian Empire; Beševliev 1981, 150–154, 161–162; Horedt 1987, 15; Ziemann 2007, 143.

55 Dekan 1972, 320, 444; Vida 1999, 189–195; Daim 2003, 497; Bálint 2008, 29–61; Profantová 2008, 215, 226–227.

56 Gavrituchin 2008, 75–76, 88.

57 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 1, 273–277; Daim 1979, 55–101; Avenarius 1985, 1021; Garam 1987, 197; Bóna 1988, 454; Zábojník 1988, 401–437; Bálint 1989, 161, 167; On the expansion of the Avar settlements in Slovakia, see also Profantová 1992, 606, who poses its limits to the line: Bratislava (Devínska Nová Ves) – Senec – Dolní Krškány – Levice – Želovce – Prša – Košice – Šebastovce.

58 Vinski 1971, 393; Bálint 1989, 152; Daim 2003, 497.

59 On the Avar-age anthropological material in Pannonia, see Lipták 1970, 117–127; Grefen-Peters 1996, 424–428; Vida 2011, 443–446 (Erzsébet Fóthi); For the Central Asian data, see Ismagulov 1970, 57–74.

Some indication of Avar military recovery is the control re-established over the contact zone with Italy in the Upper Sava valley. In 663, the Lombard King Grimoald asked for Avar assistance to suppress the revolt of Lupus, duke of Friuli. The Avars defeated Lupus in the Vipava valley, occupied Cividale, and retreated after Grimoald attacked them.⁶⁰ The conflict of the Avars with the Lombards in 663 must have been of short duration, no other Avar attack into Italy is mentioned until the Franks subdued the Lombards in 774.⁶¹

The main feature of the archeological record since the Middle Avar period is the increased use of cast bronze in metalwork. Gradually, the new, casting technique pushed aside the pressing method, a phenomenon that is now well documented in the steppe lands from Hungary to the Altai Mountains. During the Early Avar, as well as at the beginning of the Middle Avar period, only the buckles were cast in moulds, later strap ends and belt mounts were also cast.⁶² On the other hand, as Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáská points out, “during the Middle Avar period the only artifacts produced by means of advanced technologies were imports. It appears that the only influence that permeated, albeit with various degrees of intensity, the metalwork production in the Carpathian Basin throughout the Avar age was that of Byzantium”.⁶³

The belt of the Middle Avar period had fewer, but longer, secondary straps. In the male graves, most belt mounts are rectangular or square, produced by pressing or, more often, by casting in bronze (less frequently in gold or silver), with glass decoration (the luxury belts), interlaced stripes, and other geometric motifs. Animal figures appear by the end of the Middle Avar period.⁶⁴ Buckles without plates, some of trapezoidal shape, others in the shape of the number 8, appear occasionally in male graves, together with hair clips.⁶⁵

In contemporary female graves, semi-precious stones are not as used in jewelry as they were during the Early Avar period. Necklaces of small, mostly glass beads, as well as earrings with silver or bronze pendants are typical dress accessories found in such graves. Conspicuously absent during the Middle Avar period are amber beads while after ca. 680, brown and yellow glass beads were

60 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, v. 19–21 (20, 152): Ibi itaque Lupo duce perempto, reliqui qui remanserant sese per castella communiunt. Auares vero per omnes eorum fines discurrentes, cuncta rapinis invadunt vel subposito igni conburunt ... Kollautz 1965b, 631; Jarnut 1982, 60; Avenarius 1985, 1022; Christie 1998, 97–98; Pohl 1988a, 276; Krahwinkel 1992, 47–49; Štíh 2010, 102, 148 (in 664).

61 Bertels 1987, 110.

62 Dekan 1972, 444; Horedt 1987, 19–20; Daim 2003, 478, 492–493, 497; Szenthe 2016, 357–458.

63 Heinrich-Tamaska 2008a, 257.

64 Garam 1987, 195; Bálint 1989, 160; Miklós-Szőke 2008, 175, 191, 205–207.

65 Garam 1987 196; Bálint 1989, 160; Gavrituchin 2008, 75.

preferred. Some female graves contained gold earrings decorated with semi-precious stones and necklaces made either of glass beads or of gold, silver or bronze wire ornaments, most likely of Byzantine origin. Brooches are rarely decorated with gems, but women were buried with bracelets at the wrists.⁶⁶

Regarding the pottery of the Middle Avar period, no significant changes have been noted in the shape repertoire of the hand-made pottery (pots with funnel-shaped neck continued to be made during this period), while continued the production of both the black and the gray wares made on the slowly moving wheel (*tournette*). However, there is an increasing number of large pots, some of which have notches on the rim. Equally large is the number of hand-made pots with short neck and finger impressions on the rim, or with rectangular opening and knobbed rim. New are the short pots with slightly everted rims and larger diameter in the upper third of the body. There are also a few metal or imported glass vessels.⁶⁷ Pots thrown on a *tournette* from variously tempered paste, such as found in Mödling–an der Goldenen Stiege (Austria), are regarded as of local production. Such pots, with slightly everted rims and flat bases, as well as the largest diameter in the upper part of the body, influenced the ceramic repertoire of the Late Avar period.⁶⁸

Advocates of the idea that the changes taking place in the Middle Avar period were caused by migration, point out to many similarities between assemblages in the Carpathian Basin and those found in the steppe lands, e.g. into Kubrat's "Great Bulgaria." The latter have also produced necklaces of precious metals, brooches, crosses decorated with precious stones, and belt sets of Byzantine inspiration.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Onogur Bulgars probably transferred to Pannonia decorative motifs, especially floral ornaments, from the Dnieper region, the steppe lands in southern Russia and the northeastern Ciscaucasia, or from the Kama region.⁷⁰ However, the jewelry and belt sets found in the richest graves of the Middle Avar period (Igar, Ozora Tótipusztá, Dunapentele, Dunapataj, Cibakháza and Kiskőrös), to which archaeologists refer collectively as Igar-Ozora group dated between c. 660 and c. 680, are believed to be the

66 Garam 1987, 196; Bálint 1989, 159–160 (fig. 70); Pásztor 2008, p. 318–319.

67 Garam 1987, 196; Bálint 1989, 159–160; Vida 1992, 517–529; idem, 1999, 110, 119–132, 137–147, 155–156, 189–195; idem 2016, 256; Herold 2014, 224–227.

68 Daim 2003, 496–497, 559 (tab. 33.1).

69 Garam 1996, 258–259.

70 Goldina 1992, 497–501; Daim 2000, 183; Gavrituhin 2006, 15–17; idem 2008, 85; The Russian scholar (op. cit., 76–85) searches the eastern influences upon the Middle Avar culture in various areas: the South Crimea, the Kislovodsk Basin, the Volga-Don space, the Pereshchepyne horizon as well as the Voznesenka and Galiat-Romanovskaja horizons, linking part of those influences to the Khazar cultural environment.

result of the combined influences of Byzantium and the steppe lands of Eastern Europe.⁷¹ Éva Garam even explains changes in the shape of pectoral crosses to the migration of the Onogurs.⁷²

The male and female graves discovered in Ozora-Tótipusztá (western Hungary) are the best example of Middle Avar imports from Byzantium or, at least, of artifacts produced at that time in local workshops under Byzantine influence. The male grave, coin-dated to the reign of Constantine IV, between 668 and 685, included a golden belt set, the mounts of which are decorated with the “dot-comma” ornament. A great number of Byzantine jewels have been found in the female burial: a golden ring decorated with granulation, golden earrings with pendants of semi-precious stones, golden leaf-shaped pendants of a necklace, a golden cross, as well as golden wire bracelets. Those artifacts were either imported from Byzantium or manufactured in imitation of Byzantine patterns. As such, they confirm the contacts of the Avar culture with the Mediterranean area.⁷³ Furthermore, they prove that the Avar elites continued to receive luxury objects from Byzantium, which, much like in the Early Avar period, reinforced the prestige of the Khagan and his “court.”⁷⁴

Byzantine specimens have also been found in Slovakia. At Zemiansky Vrbovok, a hoard was found, which besides silver Byzantine coins (see below), contained silver objects (one cup and two plates) and jewelry. Of special interest is a silver necklace ornamented with embossed diamond-shaped motifs, and two silver bracelets with dot ornament. The assemblage may be dated between 670 and 681 on the basis of the last coins in the – possibly – collection of valuables in the possession of a Byzantine craftsman living in *Avaria*.⁷⁵ Another hoard found in Halič includes a golden necklace and two pairs of golden earrings (one of them with star-shaped granulation), most likely products of a Byzantine workshop.⁷⁶ The cemetery excavated in Želovce has produced a gold earring ornamented with granulation, a sign of a local production under

71 Garam 1987, 196; eadem 1996, 259; eadem 2001, 28–53, 116–151; Fülöp 1990, 138–146; Daim 2003, 488–490; Gavrituhin 2006, 15–17; idem 2008, 71, 74–75, 87–88; Daim and Bühler 2012, 207–224; Bollók and Szenthe 2018, 78.

72 Garam 2001, 62.

73 Garam 1987, 195–196; eadem 1991, 159, 163; eadem 1992, 145–146; eadem 2001, 30–86; Bálint 1989, 161; Daim 2003, 483, 554 (fig. 28); idem 2010, 66–67.

74 Pohl 1992, 18.

75 Čilinská 1975, 71; Garam 1992, 152–153; eadem 2001, 21–22, 48, 68; Štefanovičová 1996, 275–276; Zábojník 2007, 17 (fig. 5), 18; Turčan 2007, 41–49.

76 Štefanovičová 1996, 275; Garam 2001, 20–21, 47; Zábojník 2007, 16 (fig. 4), 18.

Byzantine influence, as well as silver cups, similar to that from Zemiansky Vrbovok, and a Byzantine buckle of the Keszthely-Pécs type.⁷⁷

4.4 Late Avar Period (710–810)

The eighth century marks the gradual decline for the Avar power in the Middle Danube. In c. 715, and after an attack to Lorch, the river Enns become the official frontier between the Avars and the Duchy of Bavaria (*limes certus*).⁷⁸ In 788, taking part to an antifrankish coalition, Avar troops marched to Friuli and to Upper Danube respectively,⁷⁹ while in 791 Charlemagne launched his first campaign against the Avars.⁸⁰ On the other hand, beside the khagan, local rulers appear in the Carolingian sources, likely an indication for the internal decomposition of the Khaganate.⁸¹ During the eighth century, there were even more transformations in the economy, society, and culture of the Avars. The increasing number of farmers was accompanied by an increasing of the poor assemblages and the finds testify a widening gap between rich and poor families. Instead of weapons, the dead were now accompanied in the grave by agricultural tools, such as sickles, buckets, adzes, as well as bones of domestic animals and fowl. On the other hand, the anthropological analysis of the skeletal remains indicates in most cases traces traumas caused by heavy work and not by injuries in battle.⁸² Because of the earlier expansion of Avar settlements, typical cultural features, such as horseman burials, are now observed both at the center and in the borderlands of *Avaria*.⁸³

The archaeological material of the Late Avar period has much in common with that of the Middle one, particularly in terms of the predominant character of casting technique. During the Late Avar period, the preferred method of casting was the lost-wax. The majority of Late Avar casts were made of copper-alloys with as much as ten percent lead. Furthermore, the Late Avar artisans employed fire-gilding and tinning, which had been known since the

77 Štefanovičová 1980, 444; eadem 1996, 275–276; Varsik 1992, 87; Garam 2001, 101; Zábajník 2007, 19 (fig. 6), 21 (fig. 8, 4).

78 Wolfram 1985, 131–132; Pohl 1988a, 308.

79 Pohl 1988a, 310, 314; Štíh 2010, 148.

80 Pohl 1988a, 315–317.

81 See Introduction, n. 90.

82 Pohl 1988a, 288–290; Bálint 1989, 164, 167. Daim 1998, 83, 89. Gavrituchin 2008, 70; Vida 2016, 264.

83 Daim 2003, 511.

Middle Avar period.⁸⁴ The transition between the Middle and the Late Avar period in the early eighth century, particularly the introduction of the so-called “griffin and tendril industry,” has been best observed archaeologically in the cemetery excavated in Mödling (Lower Austria).⁸⁵

Late Avar cemeteries have produced only a few finds of artifacts made of precious metals, and there is no high-status burial attributed to a ruler or a higher official, namely poor signs regarding the material culture of the Late Avar elite.⁸⁶ Although imported Byzantine objects are rare, Byzantium continued to have influence on the Late Avar culture. Ancient Greek and Hellenistic motifs, such as vine scrolls, cornucopia, animal-combat scenes, e.g. a lion or griffins attacking a deer, Centaurs, hippodrome scenes, Nereids on dolphins, and especially griffins appear on cast belt-fittings, motifs considered as *interpretatio avarica* of the Mediterranean forms.⁸⁷ On the other hand, are observed analogies with finds in the East European steppe lands, particularly with the Galiat-Romanovskaja horizon and the Stolbitsa group, or even with the Saltovo-Majatski culture attributed to the Khazars.⁸⁸ The popularity of the griffin on cast objects of the Late Avar period may be related to the Byzantine griffin-shaped buckles, which the Avars imitated for the decoration of the metal sheets.⁸⁹ The griffin, depicted with the body of a lion, but the head and the wings of an eagle, has a long tradition in ancient art, from which it was adopted in Roman and Byzantine art. As link of “the king of the heaven with the king of the earth,” the griffin was a symbol of power.⁹⁰ A further, likely direct, Byzantine influence is visible on some Late Avar buckles and belt mounts decorated with the bust portrait of the triumphant emperor.⁹¹ The latter motif

84 Heinrich-Tamaska 2008, 242–244, 248, 251–254; Szenthe 2012, 57–75; idem 2016, 351–370.

85 Daim 2003, 493, 495. On the other hand, Igor Gavrituchin (2008, 69–70), following another chronological model, identifies the beginning of the Late Avar period with the finds from phase D (ca. 650–680) of the cemetery excavated in Tiszafüred-Majoros in Hungary.

86 Daim 2003, 503; Szenthe 2015c, 293–312; Vida 2016, 256.

87 Dekan 1972, 329–402; Garam 1987, 192–193, 198; eadem 1996, 259; Bóna 1988, 457–459; Daim 1990, 281–292; idem 2001, 161–162, 168–177; idem 2003, 507–508; Szenthe 2013b, 139–172. On the ancient Greek and Hellenistic motifs in Pannonia during the early Christian period, see also Thomas 1982, 56–75.

88 Gavrituchin 2008, 85–89.

89 Daim 2001, 146.

90 Daim 1996b, 261.

91 Daim 1996b, 261, 263 (fig. 5. 104); idem 2010, 69–70.

appears on a gilded silver box found in Sorpe (Spain),⁹² as well as on the golden brooch from Dunapataj (Hungary).⁹³

Most common during the first phase of the Late Avar period (710–725) were rectangular belt mounts decorated with griffins, which are typically found in male burials together with strap ends divided into separately ornamented fields. During the second phase (725–760) the preferred decoration highlighted another motif of Mediterranean origin, namely animal-combat scenes, particularly two griffins attacking a deer. There are also depictions of animals, humans, as well as hunting scenes, all motifs associated with the late Hellenistic art. Meanwhile, the strap ends are decorated with the floral or scrollwork motifs. The rectangular belt mounts of the initial phase of the Late Avar period were replaced by trapezoidal, circular, pentagonal, shield-, or tongue-shaped mounts. Strap ends of the final phase of the Late Avar period (760–810) are hinged (i.e., made of multiple parts), with the ornamental emphasis now moving onto longer secondary straps. During that phase, there is a significant decrease in the depictions of griffins. Instead, the preferred repertoire includes hippodrome scenes, vegetal ornaments, animals etc. The griffin is replaced by the boar as a symbol of power. Unlike the griffin, the boar does not appear in Christian iconography, but was a favorite motif to the war-like peoples of the North (Celts, Germans, and Anglo-Saxons).⁹⁴

Female graves of the Late Avar period have produced bone needle cases, spiral rings, bronze brooches with flower-shaped glass inlays, as well as a great variety of glass beads (e.g. with dark blue rods or, mostly, melon-shaped). Multicolor bead necklaces disappear shortly after 700. The earrings are usually round or oval, made of bronze sheet and with cast prism-, grape, crescent- and star-shaped pendants. Towards the end of the Late Avar period, new types appear with S-shaped or spiral ends. Bracelets were usually decorated with animal heads or stones at their ends, those decorated with stripes are less common.⁹⁵

The ceramic repertoire of the Late Avar period includes handmade wine jugs, wheel-made gray ware with combed ornament and potter's marks on the

92 Prohászka and Daim 2015, 563–578.

93 Daim and Bühler 2012, 207–224.

94 On the belt's decoration during the Late Avar period and the motif of griffin, see mostly the studies of Falko Daim, 1990, 273–304; 1996b, 261–264 (fig. 5. 103–106); 2000, 90–91; 2001, 148–150; 2003, 497–511; see also Miklós-Szöke 1974, 60–139; idem 2008, 205–209; Brandenburg 1981, 951–995; Hayashi 2000, 253–265, who notes the depiction of the griffin either as eagle or lion, while the second prevails to the Persian art; Szenthe 2013a, 195–225; idem 2013c, 303–320; idem 2015a, 218–238; On some earlier depictions of the main Late Avar motifs, see Daim 1990, 277; Bárdos and Garam 2009, no. 612, 1360.

95 Vinski 1971, 393; Garam 1987, 197; Bálint 1989, 161–163 (fig. 72); Pásztor 2008, 317, 319.

base, as well as jugs with spouts. While the wheel-made pottery is typically decorated with combed ornament (either horizontal, or wavy lines) on the neck or on the body, the handmade pottery is characterized by finger impressions or notches on the rim of the vessel. Avar settlements in the Tisza area have produced ceramic pots with stamped geometric motifs, which are different from those of the Early Avar period.⁹⁶ A specialty of the area between the Danube and the Tisza rivers from the late seventh until the mid-eighth century is the wheel-made “yellow pottery”, namely thin pots with various decorative motifs, which has been the subject of much discussion among archaeologists. Those were high-quality pots, made of a fine paste, with ring-shaped handles, spouts, and round bases.⁹⁷ Worth mentioning in this context is that, while during the Middle Avar period wheel-thrown wares predominate in the former Roman Pannonia, most pots known from eighth-century assemblages in the Carpathian Basin are hand-made.⁹⁸

Ornamental motifs of Byzantine origin are known also from the Late Avar period, and they appear both at the center and on the periphery of the Khagana. A typical example is the cemetery excavated in Komárno, on the present-day border between Slovakia and Hungary, along the Danube. Motifs such as eagles and symbol X, known from early Byzantine coins, appear on belt sets found in Komárno, as well as birds, rosettes and decorative metal plates in the shape of griffin heads. These motifs are associated with Mediterranean patterns,⁹⁹ while the “Chinese” scroll with blossoms indicate influences from the Far East.¹⁰⁰ No less than three Byzantine buckles of the Keszthely-Pécs type have been found in Komárno, all dated to the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁰¹ Another Byzantine belt buckle of the early eighth century is known from Nové Zámky.¹⁰² The influence of the Byzantine craftsmanship may further be observed on the bronze belt mounts with attachment loops found in Čataj.¹⁰³

96 Garam 1987, 198; Bálint 1989, 163; Vida 1999, 191, 193; Herold 2014, 212–215, 220–227.

97 See Bialeková 1968, 21–33; Fülöp 1990, 145 (Central Asian origin); Vida 1996, 363; idem 1999, 83–88, 190; idem 2015, 313–329 (local production); for the rejection of both the Central Asian and Byzantine provenance, see Bálint 2008, p. 41. See also his earlier view (1989, 163–164, 174–175), about its Eastern European-nomadic parallels. The same ware is now documented archaeologically in Bulgaria. See Petrova 2007, 315–340; Hristova, 2014, 77–80.

98 Vida 2016, 262–264.

99 Čilinská 1986, 280; Trugly 1987, 282–287; idem 1993, 220–226; Daim 2003, 520, 563 (tab. 37, 5–8).

100 Daim 2000, 130–136; idem 2003, 522.

101 Varsik 1992, 86–87; Garam 2001, 102–104; Zábojník 2007, 21 (fig. 8, 3, 5–6).

102 Profantová 2008, 224.

103 Zábojník 2000, 327–365.

Several sites in Moravia have produced evidence of Late Avar belt mounts. Those found in Mikulčice show a battle between a griffin and a snake, a symbolic representation of the struggle between good and evil. An eighth-century strap end from Šárka (now within Prague) has the image of a seated female imitating likely Hellenistic depictions of Nike/Victory, Hera, or Aphrodite. This may also be a Christian symbol, not unlike the Victory depicted on early Byzantine coins.¹⁰⁴ Other belt fittings found in Moravia have images of birds or scenes from the so-called Hercules circle (Hercules and the Amazonian queen Hippolyta, Hercules's fight with the Centaurs, etc.), related to Hellenistic traditions.¹⁰⁵ Eighth-century Byzantine buckles are known from both Moravia and Bohemia.¹⁰⁶

The cultural influence of Byzantium is also visible on eighth-century Avar sites on the southern border of the Khaganate. Belt sets believed to be of Byzantine production have been found in Austria (Hohenberg, Kanzianiberg, Micheldorf-Kremsdorf), as well as Croatia (Biskupija, Skradin, Smrdelj).¹⁰⁷ The appearance of belt sets in those regions has in fact been attributed to the Byzantine influence upon local Slavic principalities, for the decorated belt was an attribute of many high-ranking officials in Byzantium (magister, kuropalates, nobelissimus, zoste patrikia).¹⁰⁸ The Slavic populations in those territories were most likely already independent from the Avars.¹⁰⁹

Such was the case of Carantania in the Eastern Alps, the territory, as noted, once ruled Walluc (*marca Vinedorum*) and escaped from Avar control in the 620s. Centered upon the Zollfeld in Carinthia with the neighboring Ulrichsberg,¹¹⁰ Carantania included the eastern Tyrol, Carinthia, the valleys of the rivers Enns and Krems, the southern part of Lower Austria and a part of northern Slovenia (along the rivers Drava and Mur). Its natural boundaries were Bavaria to the west and northwest, the river Schwarza to the north, the mountains between the Bucklige Welt and the Middle Mur to the east, and the

104 Daim 2001, 180–182; Profantová 1992, 621–622. See also Daim 2000, 130–136 for possible Chinese influences as in the case of Komárno.

105 Erdélyi 1988, 359–360; Daim 2000, 122–124; idem 2001, 181–182; idem 2010, 68.

106 Profantová 2008, 219–230.

107 Daim 1998, 90–92; idem 2000, 107–110, 127–130, 136–159; idem 2001, 158, 165, 177–180, 182–185; idem 2010, 67–69; Dal Ri 2000, 249–252; Neuhäuser 2000, 253–266; Vida 2000, 305–325; Nowotny 2007, 190–193.

108 Daim 2000, 185–187; idem 2001, 152–153. Higher officials with decorated belts appear in the mid-eighth-century frescoes in the church of S. Maria Antiqua in Rome, in which a young man is dressed like a *magister militum*; see Rettner 2000, 267–282; Daim 2000, 77.

109 Pohl 1988a, 276; Daim 2000, 187–194; idem 2003, 510–511.

110 Wolfram 1985, 137–138 (Zollfeld and Lurnfeld); Štih 2010, 111–112.

Carnian Alps to the southeast.¹¹¹ In these areas, the Slavs settlers of the late sixth century mixed with the preexisting Romance-speaking and Germanic populations.¹¹² This political entity is first mentioned in the sources under the year 663, on the occasion of the Avar attack on Friuli.¹¹³ After the murder of duke Lupus, his son Arnefrit fled “to the people of the Slavs in Carnuntum, which is wrongly called Carantanum.” Arnefrit found refuge and military aid there, and unsuccessfully tried to regain the Friulian Duchy. In the early eighth century, the so-called *Cosmography of Ravenna* mentions for first time the ethnic name *Carontani*, which is in fact the same name as the *Quarantani* (*Karentani* or *Carantani*) in the late ninth-century *Conversio*.¹¹⁴ The aforementioned finds should rather be dated to the first half of the eighth century, as in 743/45, Carantania passed under Bavarian control and, furthermore, into the western sphere of cultural influence.¹¹⁵

The influence of the Byzantine art on the early material culture of Croatia is visible, among other things, in the so-called “early Croatian earrings” (golden or silver earrings with grape-shaped pendants) as well as S-, Ω- or with star-shaped, silver or bronze earrings. Such influences may be explained in terms of the cultural and trade contacts established between the interior of Dalmatia and the Byzantine outposts on the coast.¹¹⁶

The most important hoard dated to the Late Avar period, and one of the richest in medieval Europe, is that found in the late eighteenth century in Nagyszentmiklós (now Sânnicolau Mare, in western Romania). Apart from earrings and a Byzantine cross, the collection includes 23 gold vessels. Most of them, and the qualitative better, were made in the seventh and eighth century, while a few may be dated to the ninth century. Worth mentioned are the inscriptions on some vessels, which may be divided into three categories: a) Greek inscriptions in Greek characters; b) Turkic inscriptions in Greek characters, or bilingual, with Greek and runic characters; and c) Turkic inscriptions

111 Avenarius 1974, 137; Čilinská 1967, 83; Wolfram 1985, 139; idem 1987, 341; Bertels 1987, 105–107; Eggers 2001, 79; Štih 2010, 102–103, 114–115, 146–148.

112 Štih 2010, 115–116.

113 See above, n. 60.

114 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, v, 22, 152: Sed metuens Grimualdi regis vires, fugiit ad Sclavorum gentem in Carnuntum, quod corrupte vocitant Carantanum; *Cosmography of Ravenna*, 76–77: ... que modo a Bauuariis dominatur, et Italiam, inter Carontanos et Italiam, inter patriam Carnium et Italiam; que iugus Carnium dicebatur [ab] antiquitus Alpīs Iulia; Bertels 1987, 88–90, 107–121; Curta 2001a, 110; Štih 2010, 102–103, 111.

115 Wolfram 1985, 132 (in 743); Štih 2010, 104, 117.

116 Ferluga 1987, 627; Goldstein 1996, 259; Sokol 1999, 124; Curta 2006a, 102; see also, Petrinec 2010, 18–22; Bühler 2014. On the Avar finds in Croatia, see Daim 2001, 177–180; Curta 2006a, 102; Gradanin 2009, 16–30.

with runic characters. There are at least three chronological groups in the collection. On the vessel n. 7, which belongs to the first group (dated to the seventh century), a figure keeps an eagle, which has a shell in its beak. This is believed to be a scene of Zeus with Ganymedes. In the second group (dated to the late seventh or early eighth century), the imagery is more complex, namely mythical motifs as Centaurs, animal-combat scenes, depictions of horsemen, etc. In the third group (dated to the mid- or late eighth century), the peacock-dragon is the most prominent figure. The decorations with spirals of the third group occur in the Eastern Alps and in the Danube region, initially on the belt mounts of the Hohenberg type, which are believed to be of Italo-Byzantine origin. While the exact dates of the various groups may be disputed, it is beyond any doubt that various components of the collection are products of different workshops and that they constitute a mixture of various cultural elements, Byzantine, nomadic and late Sassanian.¹¹⁷

There is no way to associate the components of the second and third groups with known political or diplomatic contacts between Byzantium and the Avars, as they all are mostly from the eighth century. The idea that some of vessels in the hoard were produced in Constantinople and reached the Avars as gifts from Constantine V (741–775) to the Avars¹¹⁸ must be rejected, for there is no testimony of any contact between the two sides during his reign, and the vessels themselves cannot be pinpointed to such a narrowly defined chronological interval.

4.5 The Numismatic Finds

Besides offering key arguments for the dating of Avar-age assemblages, the Byzantine coins that came to light within the area of the Khaganate represent an important body of evidence for the study of the Byzantine-Avar relations. Particularly beneficial have been the numismatic finds for the dating

¹¹⁷ László and Racz 1983; Bálint 1989, 187–192; idem 2002, 57–80; idem 2010; Göbl and Róna-Tas 1995; Daim and Stadler 1996, 439–445; Daim 2003, 515–516, 568–569 (tab. 42–43); see also *Sánnicolau Mare*. For the “Bulgarian identity” of the treasure, see the volume *Gold Treasure*. Some scholars, as Ekaterina Goldina (1992, 499) have pointed out Persian influences on the Late Avar art. On the other hand, István Erdélyi (1988, 366–369), specifically treats as Persian (or of Persian origin) the griffin, the boar, the attacking dragon and some floral motifs. Against those views, see Bollók 2015b, 43–70.

¹¹⁸ Rusu 1986, 189, n. 8; Furthermore, Ádám Bollók (2015a, 172–180), believes that the Kiskundorozsma belt mounts may have been gifts from Constantine V to the Avars. Again, there is no indication whatsoever of contacts between Byzantium and the Avars, much less of the latter being “clients” of Byzantium during Constantine V’s reign.

of assemblages of the Early and Middle Avar periods, while the Late one is comparatively much more difficult to date by numismatic means.¹¹⁹ Some 600 coins have so far been found on some 100 different sites, and they range from Justinian I to Leo IV (775–780), with the reigns of the emperors between Justin II to Heraclius (565–641), making up the majority of finds.¹²⁰ According to Péter Somogyi, “regarding the much diminished and localized flow of Byzantine solidi into *Avaria* after 626, there is a clear correlation between grave and stray finds, which are mostly post-650 solidi struck for Constans II.”¹²¹

Byzantine gold coins struck before 626 entered the Khaganate mostly as part of the annual tribute paid by the Byzantine emperors in order to ensure peace with the Avars. According to the testimony of the sources and the relevant calculations, the Avars received from Byzantium about 6,5 million gold coins, in addition to what they got from ransom payments (often a gold coin per POW), as well as from plunder. By 574, the annual tribute amounted to 80,000 solidi, but that amount increased in 585 to 100,000, in 598 to 120,000, in 604 to 140,000 (probably 180,000 between 620 and 623), and from 623 until 626 to 200,000 solidi. All this amount of gold most likely helped the Avar elites to survive during the crisis that followed the defeat under the walls of Constantinople in 626.¹²² The Avars may have also collected tribute from some important urban centers, if one accepts as credible the relevant testimony of John of Ephesus.¹²³ Furthermore, a significant number of copper coins (more than half of all coin finds) seem to point to trade relations between Byzantium and the Avars, at least until 626.¹²⁴ Regarding the trade, Peter Somogyi notes that “after the interruption of the tribute payments in 626, small amounts of gold continued to enter the territory of the Avar qaganate until the eighth century by means of independent, ‘private’ transactions.”¹²⁵ The Avar khaganate also played an

119 Štefanovičová 1980, 446; Garam 1987, 195; Bóna 1988, 441; Bálint 1989, 149; Zábojník 2008, 301–306.

120 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 II, 217; Štefanovičová 1980, 447; Garam 1987, 193; Somogyi 1997, 109–117; idem 2008a, 347–393; Winter 2009, 328–333. On the other hand, Ioan Stanciu (2008, 415) believes that some of the coins struck for Justinian I may have initially been part of the Byzantine subsidies for the Gepids.

121 Somogyi 2008b, 86, 103; see also idem 2014, 87–92.

122 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 II, 216; Kiss 1986, 109; Bóna 1988; 446–447; Pohl 1988a, 180–181; Hahn 1996, 250–251; Winter 2000, 46; idem 2009, 325–326, 330–332; Somogyi 2008a, 357; idem 2008b, 101–102.

123 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 45–49, 259: Et profecti urbes duas a Romanis expugnaverunt et cetera castra et incolis dixerunt: “Abite serite et metite, et dimidium tantum tributi a vobis sumemus.”

124 Kozub 1997, 241, 244; Winter 2009, 329.

125 Somogyi 2008b, 103, 132.

“intermediary” role for the distribution of Byzantine coins further afield, into neighbouring areas settled by Slavic tribes.¹²⁶

The most important coin hoards in *Avaria* came to light in Firtuşu (eastern Transylvania, Romania), with some 5,000 Roman and Byzantine coins ranging from Aurelian (270–275) to Heraclius, and Zemiansky Vrbovok (south-western Slovakia). The latter includes 20 Byzantine silver coins (according to other scholars, either 18 or 19), namely one hexagram struck for the emperors Heraclius and Heraclius-Constantinus, eighteen *miliarensia* minted for Constans II at the end of his reign, and another hexagram struck at the beginning of Constantine IV’s reign.¹²⁷ Most Byzantine coins found in Slovakia, and dated between the sixth and the eighth centuries, come to light in the southwestern part of the country, in areas of intensive settlement, economically developed hinterland, and active in the international trade, particularly the Danube valley.¹²⁸ In Avar-age graves, imitations have been found of both Byzantine *solidi* and Byzantine silver coins. An imitation of *solidus* could be an *obolus* in the grave or a jewelry too. Most among those used as *oboli*, struck for Heraclius, Constans II and Constantine IV. As *oboli* were also used thin round gold foils.¹²⁹

The relatively small number of coin finds from the Middle and Late Avar periods was rightly explained in terms of the end, after 626, of any annual tribute to the Avars.¹³⁰ On the other hand, Byzantine gold coins struck after that date have also been found in Avar-age assemblages and some scholars, likely unknowing the new geopolitical data after 626, dispute the end of the annual payments.¹³¹ The significant reduction of coin finds after the reign of Constantine IV, as well as the almost complete interruption of Byzantine imports (particularly of luxury artifacts) have been also associated with the establishment of the Bulgar khaganate, which – supposedly – interrupted the direct communication between Byzantium and the Avars through the Balkans.¹³² However, the reduction may be better explained in terms of the general crisis of

126 Somogyi 2014, 92–98.

127 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 259–260; Avenarius 1985, 1024; Somogyi 1997, 40–42, 97–98, 137–139; idem 2008a, 352–353; idem 2008b, 89, 131; Hunka 2009, 396–397; Zábajník 2009, 406–408, 413; Sophoulis 2012, 124.

128 Hunka 2009, 398–399.

129 Bóna 1993, 529–538; Somogyi 1997, 122–134; idem 2008b, 87–88; idem 2014, 139–154, 243–245; Wołoszyn 1999, 176; Winter 2000, 51–52; idem 2009, 330, 333–334; Zábajník 2009, 405.

130 Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 II, 217–218; Kiss 1986, 111; Bóna 1993, 531, 536; Somogyi 1997, 9; idem 2008b, 103, considering the small amounts of gold after 626 as independent, “private” transactions Winter 2000, 45.

131 Avenarius 1985, 1024–1025; Kiss 1991, 122–123 (contrary to his earlier view, 1986, 111).

132 Vinski 1971, 393; Horedt 1987, 20–21; Gavrituchin 2008, 74.

Byzantium, particularly of the monetary system. Because of that crisis, coin finds of the so-called “Dark Ages” are also rare inside the Byzantine Empire.¹³³ Moreover, one should not forget that following the Frankish-Avar wars of the late eighth century, the largest part of the Avar treasure was plundered. That treasure may have contained a large number of coins, likely struck in the names of Byzantine emperors, valuable material for the restoration of the Byzantine-Avar relations.¹³⁴

A Bulgar connection has also been proposed for coin finds dated after the mid-seventh century. The earlier view was that the coins struck for the emperors Constans II and Constantine IV are not the result of direct Byzantine-Avar relations, but of the migration into the Carpathian Basin of the Onogur Bulgars, who had obtained them from the steppe lands north of the Black Sea.¹³⁵ That view is now largely discredited. Péter Somogyi has proposed that “the import of Byzantine silver coins, especially *miliarensia*, bespeaks the sudden change in imports taking place after the interruption in 626 of the tribute payments. Further, even the function of the gold coins was different. While out of all gold coins struck before 650, eighteen specimens (twenty percent) were perforated or turned into pendants, there is just one perforated specimen (five percent) among coins struck after 650.”¹³⁶

When one takes into consideration all coin finds from the interruption of the annual tribute paid to the Avars (626) to the end of the Frankish-Avar wars (796), there is almost no break in the flow of Byzantine coins until c. 775. Somogyi gives the following distribution of coins, by emperors:¹³⁷ Constans II 34 (13 gold/18 silver/3 copper), Constantine IV 7 (6 gold/1 silver), Theodosius III 1 (gold), Leo III 1 (gold) and one *solidus* of the emperors Constantine V and Leo IV, found in Svätý Jur, close to Bratislava.¹³⁸ Besides imitations of coins struck for the emperors Constans II and Constantine IV, there are also copper

133 Štefanovičová 1980, 448; Kiss 1986, 113–114; Bóna 1993, 536; Kozub 1997, 244; Wołoszyn 1999, 177; Morrisson 2002, 954–958; For a presentation of the relevant views, see also Somogyi 2008b, 83–87, 135–136.

134 See ch. 5.3.2, n. 73.

135 Bóna 1993, 531, 536.

136 Somogyi 2008b, 103.

137 Regarding the Greek version of the monograph, where I followed the catalogue provided by M. Kozub (1997, 242), the number of coins and the emperors are actually fewer. As the Polish scholar assured me, part of the Byzantine coins, which he found in museum's collections, are not linked to the Avar khaganate. However, the here provided data do not affect much the conclusions drawn in the Greek version.

138 Somogyi 1997, 110. idem 2008a, 389; idem 2008b, 91–93; idem 2014, 78–85, 240–243; see also Winter 2000, 48–52, 58–60; idem 2009, 328–329; For the last coin in Svätý Jur, see Hunka and Budaj 2005, 63–72; Zábajník 2007, 16; idem 2009, 406; Somogyi 2014, 201.

imitations of coins struck for Constantine IV (Pázmándfalu) and Justinian II (Andrid).¹³⁹ However, finds said to be from areas outside the Avar khaganate may also be associated with the Avars. Such is the case of the gold coin struck for emperor Theodosius III found in Gaj/Gajálya (eastern Serbia),¹⁴⁰ the follis struck for Constantine V and Leo IV from Zellerndorf in Austria,¹⁴¹ that minted for Constantine V and Leo IV (or, according to Péter Somogyi, for Leo III) found in Voila (in the upper valley of the Olt river),¹⁴² as well as a bronze coin of Tiberius II from Mediaș/Medgyes (central Transylvania, on the river Târnava Mare).¹⁴³ Furthermore, a gold coin found in Ószőny (near Komárom, in northern Hungary) is attributed by some scholars to Anastasius II.¹⁴⁴

4.6 Christian Symbols in the Avar Khaganate

The archaeological record of the Avar khaganate includes many artifacts with Christian symbols, which can most likely be related to the Byzantine Empire. The majority of the Christian symbols came to light between the river Ráb/Raab and the mouth of the Drava, and, on the other hand, in the regions of central-southern Hungary around the modern towns of Kiskőrös and Szeged.¹⁴⁵ Many of them are pectoral (pendant) crosses, produced either by means of the repoussé or cast.¹⁴⁶ Some bear Greek inscriptions: ΖΩΗ (*zoe*, meaning “life”), and ΦΩΣ (*phos*, meaning “light”), as on the crosses from Sadovec and Grave K in Balatonfűzfő (sixth c.). The cross from grave 104 in Závod (sixth-seventh c.) bears the inscription ΑΓΙΟC ΑΓΙΟC ΑΓΙΟC ΚC CΑΒΑΩΤ (“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Sabaoth”).¹⁴⁷ Gold, silver or bronze crosses may also be decorated with granulation, gems, or imitations of the latter. Imitations of genuinely Byzantine crosses have also been found. Some of the best examples include a silver cross from Vajska (grave no. 5), the silver cross from Deszk G (grave no. 37), the bronze cross from Kölked-Feketekapu A (grave no. 207), and the golden cross

¹³⁹ Somogyi 2014, 245.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem 78–80.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem 78, 80–81, 90.

¹⁴² Ibidem 79–81.

¹⁴³ Ibidem 78–80, 90.

¹⁴⁴ See Somogyi 2014, 46, 52, 78–80, who links the coin with Anastasius I.

¹⁴⁵ László 1969, 152; see also, Garam 2001, 65. Kardaras 2012, 85.

¹⁴⁶ László 1969, 150–151; Kollautz 1970, 22–24; Garam 2001, 57–65. Bugarski 2009, 221–225, 229; on the distribution of the Byzantine reliquary-crosses, see Musin 2012, 61–94.

¹⁴⁷ László 1969, 150–151; Kollautz 1970, 22–24; Garam 2001, 57, 60; Vida 2002, 184; Curta 2005, 197, n. 45; Kardaras 2012, 82.

from the female grave in Ozora-Tótipusztá.¹⁴⁸ Finally, lead pectoral crosses (most of them without any decoration) are known from other sites either into the former Roman Pannonia or the area between the Danube and the Tisza.¹⁴⁹

Christian symbols were also used as decoration on jewelry. Some sixth- to seventh-century crescent-shaped earrings show crosses, monograms, as well as pigeons or peacocks (Christian symbols of immortality). Such earrings are known primarily from the area of Keszthely and Pécs, and must be viewed either as imports from Byzantium, or as local imitations of Byzantine models. Crosses appear also on some earrings with star-shaped pendant.¹⁵⁰ A glass neck chain found in Tiszavasvári-Koldusdomb is decorated with crosses.¹⁵¹ Necklaces found in female or child burials of the Early Avar period have sometimes small amulets (*capsulae*) decorated with such motifs as the fish or the cross. The small silver pendant from Balatonfűzfő has the inscription ΠΕΤΡΟΣ and the figure of the Apostle, a clear indication of a Byzantine import. Lead pendants that have been found in poorly furnished female graves, are likely to be imitations of small Byzantine golden pieces, ornamented with crosses. Such pendants came to light in the area between the Danube and the Tisza, as well as in the lands to the east from the Tisza.¹⁵²

A particularly strong association with Christianity may be also observed in the case of the disc-brooches of the Keszthely-Pécs group (dated to the sixth and early seventh century), which bear images of Christ, angels, holy riders, crosses, etc. Such brooches have also been found in Albania, Montenegro, and Calabria. Disc-brooches continued to be used west of the Middle Danube well into the eighth century, when the so-called Baranya group made its appearance.¹⁵³ Brooches with Christian symbols came to light also in

148 Kollautz 1970, 21; Garam 1991, 159–161; eadem 2001, 57–63; Daim 2003, 520, 554 (pl. 28); Curta 2005, 197–198, n. 45–46; Bugarski 2009, 221, 224–225; Bárdos and Garam 2009, no. 157, 427, 612, 1254; Kardaras 2012, 82; Bollók and Szenthe 2018, 76.

149 Garam 2001, 59, 63–65; Vida 2002, 183; Bugarski 2009, 221–224, 229; Curta 2011, 305–308; Kardaras 2012, 83.

150 Garam 2001, 18–23; Kardaras 2012, 83.

151 Pásztor 2008, 318.

152 László 1969, 150; Kollautz 1970, 30; Garam 2001, 34–37; Daim 2002, 113–132; Vida 2002, 181, 184–186; idem 2008, 28, 36, 40; Müller 2010, 203–204; Curta 2011, 306; Kardaras 2012, 83.

153 László 1969, 148–150; Kollautz 1970, 19–20, 24–27; Zalesskaja 1982, 106–111; Garam 1993, 103–105; eadem 2001, 51–57; Vida 2002, 184; idem 2009, 241; Daim 2003, 476, 519; Curta 2005, 184; Tóth Endre 2005, 183–190; Müller 2010, 210; Curta 2011, 303; Kardaras 2012, 83; Bollók 2017, 431. Disputable is the consideration of the bird as Christian symbol, e.g. the pins with a bird-shaped head. See Vida 2009, 244–249.

Nagyharsány (with the inscription APXANTEAE BO[ΘΗ]ETXI) and Ellend.¹⁵⁴ The case of those finds particularly attracted the interest of scholarship regarding their origin, symbolisms etc. Their Byzantine origin asserts Éva Garam, Falko Daim associates those finds with pilgrimage, while Ádám Bollók attributes to the cross (either pectoral or depiction), as well as to the circular box brooches and the amulets, apotropaic character. Nonetheless, somebody has to take into account that almost all the finds, together with the three-aisled basilica, related to the first horizon of the Keszthely culture (according to Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska from 568 to c. 630 and a second one from the mid-seventh to the early ninth century), where a Christian Romance community was flourished and any relation of the Avars with that first horizon should be excluded.¹⁵⁵

Among finger-rings from Avar-age assemblages, especially noteworthy are sigillary specimens of Byzantine origin, which have Greek monograms, crosses, or other Christian symbols on the bezel. Sigillar rings have been found in Keszthely, Pécs, and northwestern Hungary (particularly in Budakalász and Környe). Simple or cross-shaped monograms are known from Keszthely-Fenekpuszta, Bóly, Zamárdi and Pécs-Gyárvaros. In some cases (e.g. in Kölked), the ring has multiple motifs, such as crosses and cypresses. Another group of silver finger-rings (*Kopfplatte*) is known from the cemetery excavated around the former *horreum* inside the fourth-century stronghold in Keszthely-Fenekpuszta. Those rings are decorated with a cross, a fish, or a couple. The cross-shaped ornament also appears on some rings with spiral ends as well as on the Sucidava type of buckles, a few specimens of which have been found in Gepidic graves. The type is dated after the second third of the sixth century and was widespread in the Balkans.¹⁵⁶

Besides crosses, late sixth- to early seventh-century strap ends are also decorated with mask motifs, which Éva Garam has interpreted as images of Christ.¹⁵⁷ The fish is the main motif on belt mounts of the Törökkanisza and Tarnaméra type. The belt mounts from Novi Kneževac/Törökkanisza show cypresses and dot-comma ornaments, with the monogram APEΘOY in the middle. Similar mounts appear in the southern parts of the Hungarian Plain, as well as between the Danube and the Tisza rivers. Medallions with Christian monograms

154 Kollautz 1970, 24, 27; Garam 2001, 52; Curta 2005, 184; Vida, 2009, 238, n. 42; Kardaras 2012, 83.

155 Garam 2001, 54; Daim 2002, 113–132; Heinrich-Tamáska 2010a, 104–106; Bollók 2016, 217–229; idem 2017, 431–434.

156 Garam 2001, 74–81, 95–97; Kardaras 2012, 83.

157 Garam 2001, 130–132; Daim 2003, 476–477; Kardaras 2012, 83.

may also be found on strap-ends of the Kunágota-Mersin type.¹⁵⁸ A cross is likely depicted on a belt mount from the horseman grave in Kunágota.¹⁵⁹

Other belt mounts show scenes from the Old Testament, such as the Daniel in the pit of lions or the miracle of Jonah.¹⁶⁰ A belt from Kunszentmárton was decorated with an anchor-shaped cross and floral motifs adapted to the cross,¹⁶¹ while belt mounts decorated with the tree of life are known from sites in Moravia (Uherské Hradiště and Dolní Dunajovice).¹⁶² In some cases, one can identify Christian symbols (crosses or cross-shaped ornaments) on weights and assorted finds dated to the seventh century: the silver plate from Tépe, a bowl from Zamárdi-Rétiföldek and a bronze lamp from Tápiógyörgye-Nagymegyerpusztá.¹⁶³ Finally, a peculiar motif is the symbol X, which may be found on some Middle Avar belt mounts, as well as on belt fittings from Komárno.¹⁶⁴

The rich Christian finds from Keszthely, along with the presence on that site of a flourishing Christian community during the Early Avar period have been interpreted in terms of the survival of an ecclesiastical center associated with Rome.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, some of the Christian symbols, for example those on the wooden disk *capsulae*, betray the presence in the Carpathian Basin of Germanic peoples (Lombards and Gepids).¹⁶⁶ During the late seventh and eighth centuries, only a limited number of finds feature Christian symbols, for example the iron crosses from Székkutas (one of them gilded and with inlaid glass stones), which were most likely placed on top of coffins.¹⁶⁷ Four vessels of the Nagyszentmiklós hoard show crosses as well (nos. 3, 4, 19 and 21).¹⁶⁸

The presence of those symbols may indicate the survival of a Christian population within the Avar khaganate, given that Pannonia had been Christianized long before the Avar settlement.¹⁶⁹ During the Avar age, and despite the flight of Christian populations, Christian communities continued to exist in Pannonia, mostly in Keszthely, in Savaria (modern-day Szombathely) and the

158 Bálint 1989, 156; Garam 2001, 77–78, 139–146; Daim 2003, 471; Kardaras 2012, 83.

159 See Garam 2001, 338, pl. 87.

160 Kollautz 1970, 32–37; Vida 1998, 534.

161 Daim 2003, 480.

162 Profandová 1992, 618; see also Miklós-Szőke 2008, 187 (Kölked-Feketekapu A, gr. 107).

163 Garam 2001, 160–162, 173–176; Daim 2003, 480, 482; See also, Kardaras 2012, 83.

164 Miklós-Szőke 2008, 208; see also above, ch. 4.4, n. 99.

165 Vida 2002, 181; idem, 2009, 236–237; Daim 2003, 476.

166 László 1969, 143–144; Vida 2002, 184–185.

167 László 1969, 150–151; Vida, 1998, 534; Garam 2001, 61; Daim 2003, 520; Pásztor 2008, 318.

168 Bálint 2002, 60, 70, 79.

169 See Barton 1975, 44–135; Tóth Elvira 1987, 255–261; Tóth Endre 1998–1999, 117–130. Heinrich-Tamáska 2016, 291–306.

area of Sopiana (modern-day Pécs).¹⁷⁰ The Avars may have also become familiar with Christian symbols after the subjugation of certain nomadic tribes, like the Kutrigurs and the Onogurs in the lands north of the Black Sea, who had already come in contact with the Byzantine culture and part of them followed the Avars in the Carpathian Basin.¹⁷¹ Significant may also be the migration of Onogurs to *Avaria* after 660. Furthermore, relatively large numbers of Christian captives were forcefully moved into the Carpathian Basin after the Avar raids at the end of the sixth and the first decades of the seventh century (see below).

Irrespective of how the presence of Christian symbols inside the Khaganate is to be interpreted, the main question is whether they have anything to do with the Avars, namely whether the Avars adopted Christianity at any point in their history. Considering the Byzantine-Avar relations, no evidence exists either of a missionary activity from Constantinople to the Avars or any conversion of the latter to Christianity prior to the Frankish wars led by Charlemagne.¹⁷² Nonetheless, quite enigmatic are the inscriptions with Christian context, i.e. the baptism, on the vessels no. 9 and 10 of the Nagyszentmiklós hoard.¹⁷³ Despite the lack of evidence, the presence of Christian symbols in the archaeological record of the Avar age made room for assumptions about missionary activity within the Khaganate, and conversion of a part of the Avars to Christianity.¹⁷⁴

Tivadar Vida shares the opinion that Christian influences in the multi-ethnic Carpathian Basin, along with the use of pagan motifs, led to a religious syncretism, as illustrated by the combination of crosses and amulets in some graves.¹⁷⁵ Other scholars attribute disc-brooches with Christian symbols to people of the Christian faith.¹⁷⁶ As Sebastian Brather put it, “despite the lack of any detailed information, there is no reason to exclude the amulets from a Christian context.... Magic and amulets are therefore appropriate for good Christians too.”¹⁷⁷ On the basis of historical, ethnographic, and sociological analogies, Almut Schülke raises key questions about the relation of the

170 László 1969, 144; Kollautz 1970, 18–19; Tóth Elvira 1987, 253–255; Garam 2001, 65; Curta 2005, 184; Vida, 2009, 243; Kardaras 2012, 82, 84.

171 László 1969, 143; Vida 2002, 180, 185; Sophoulis 2012, 89; Kardaras 2012, 79–81, 85; Golden 2015, 352.

172 Curta 2005, 187.

173 See Albrecht 2015, 140–142; Bollók 2017, 431.

174 László 1969, 146; Kollautz 1970, 24–27; Obolensky 1971, 136; Vida 1998, 536.

175 Vida 2002, 180, 185–187; idem 2008, 28–29, 40; idem 2016, 261.

176 Garam 2001, 54; Vida 2002, 184.

177 Brather 2012, 341.

assemblages with rituals, the ideology, and the material culture of any given society.¹⁷⁸ In his recent studies, Ádám Bollók distinguishes the Byzantine artefacts with Christian symbols used by the Avars (such as gold earrings, belt buckles and strap ends) from artefacts made for conveying the Christian faith *per se*, as the pectoral crosses and the circular box brooches. The first group may be not related to adoption of Christianity in the Khaganate but the second (to the exception of certain finds, e.g. the gold cross from Ozora-Totipusztá) reflect the spread of Christianity in the Khaganate's population. Regarding the latter, the Hungarian scholar notes that the majority of the circular box brooches are coming from the areas west of the Middle Danube, namely the former Roman Pannonia, settled by Germanic and Romanised populations, and, mostly, they have no equivalents to the Byzantine area, in other words they were made in the Carpathian Basin. Also, he promotes a new interpretative model, based on the regional and local "Christianities" into the multiethnic and multicultural Avar khaganate, where the Christian communities and the symbols had their own place and influences to the others.¹⁷⁹ But even to this in depth approach remains open the main question, the width of Christianity's impact to the Avars themselves, mostly to the lower social classes.

Ultimately, however, the mere presence of Christian motifs in the material culture of the Avars is no proof of their adoption of Christianity. Western sources strongly suggests that the Avars were not Christian. For example, bishop Rupert of Salzburg decided in 696 not to go to Pannonia,¹⁸⁰ while the Bavarian duke Theodo (c. 685–690) dissuaded Emmeram, bishop of Regensburg, from going on a mission to the Avars.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, in the late eighth century, Carolingian sources characterize the Avars as pagans and persecutors of Christians.¹⁸²

The gradual conversion of the Avars to Christianity likely started only after the campaigns against them (791–796) led by Charlemagne,¹⁸³ who had the

178 Schülke 1997, 457–468; Emphasising on the social parameters and the symbolisms than to religious "labels" is also the approach of Ádám Bollók (2016, 215–230).

179 Bollók 2016, 216–217; idem 2017, 428–436.

180 *Vita Hrodberti*, 159, 5; Barton 1975, 204; Pohl 1988a, 308; Kardaras 2012, 85.

181 Arbeo of Frising, *Vita Haimhrammi*, 34, 5; Kollautz 1970, 38; Barton 1975, 205; Tóth Elvira 1987, 263; Pohl 1988a, 308; Wood 2001, 150–151; Kardaras 2012, 85.

182 *Annales Einhardi*, 176 (791): ... quam fecerunt Avari contra sanctam ecclesiam vel populum christianum, unde iustitias per missos impetrare non valuerunt,... See also *Conventus Episcoporum*, 174; *De Pippini regis*, 116–117 (a. 796); László 1969, 146; Kollautz 1970, 15–16, 27; Tírr 1976, 111; Vida 2002, 179; Koziak 2011, 151; Kardaras 2012, 85.

183 *Annales Einhardi*, 180 (795): Ibi etiam venerunt missi Tudun, qui in gente et regno Avarorum magnam potestatem habebat; qui dixerunt, quod idem tudun cum terra et populo

support of the Catholic clergy during his military operations.¹⁸⁴ The first organize attempt to convert the Avars is that of the summer of 796, during Charlemagne's second campaign, according to the *Acts* of the Synod taking place *ad ripas Danubii* in the presence of Paulinus, the Patriarch of Aquileia.¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, the churchmen gathered for that Synod acknowledged the survival of a Christian community and poorly trained clergy in Pannonia.¹⁸⁶ Two years later, the Christianisation of the Avars was still in progress.¹⁸⁷ However, in 805, when Charlemagne moved a group of Avars from the center of the former Khaganate, between the Danube and the Tisza, to northwestern Pannonia (*inter Sabariam et Carnuntum*),¹⁸⁸ two rulers with Christian names are mentioned, Theodore and Abraham.¹⁸⁹

Taking into account the evidence of the Western sources, and despite the numerous, aforementioned finds with Christian motifs and symbols, one can draw the conclusion that until the Frankish wars the Avars continued to

suo se regi dedere vellet et eius ordinatione christianam fidem suscipere vellet. ibidem, 182 (796): In eodem anno Tudun secundum pollicitationem suam cum magna parte Avarorum ad regem venit, se cum populo sui et patria regi dedit; ipse et populos baptizatus est, et honorifice muneribus donati redierunt ... See also *Annales Laureshamenses*, 36 (795); Alkuin, *Epistolae*, n. 99, 143–110, 157 (796); Theodulfus, *Ad Carolum regem*, 484; Váczy 1972, 407–420; Pohl 1988a, 204–205, 320; Krahwinkler 1992, 148–152; Kožiak 2011, 151–152. On the Carolingian wars, see also Szöke 1990–1991, 145–149.

184 Monk of St. Gall, *De gestis Karoli*, 738, 17; Pohl 1988a, 204–205, 320; Szöke 1990–1991, 145–149; Reimitz 2001, 190, 199–203; Kožiak 2011, 150–151; Kardaras 2012, 85.

185 *Conventus Episcoporum*, 172–176 (a. 796); Szöke 1990–1991, 146; Reimitz 2001, 190, 199–203; Kožiak 2011, 155–166.

186 *Conventus Episcoporum* ..., 176; Illi vero, qui ab inlitteratis clericis baptizati existunt et, cum intinguerentur in aqua, nec illi fidem, quia nesciebant, professi sunt, nec ille, qui baptizabat, dixit ... László 1969, 145; Barton 1975, 186; Tóth Elvira 1987, 262–263; Müller 1996b, 266; Vida 2002, 186; Curta 2005, 182; Kožiak 2011, 163.

187 Alkuin, *Epistolae*, 146/235–236; Pohl 1988a, 320; Reimitz 2001, 200–201; For a detailed approach of the Alkuin's, *Epistolae* regarding the conversion of the Avars, see Phelan 2014, 95–103.

188 Wolfram 1987, 349; Pohl 1988a, 302, 322.

189 *Annales Einhardi*, 192 (805): Non multo post capcanus, princeps Hunorum, propter necessitatem populi sui imperatorem adiit, postulans sibi locum dari ad habitandum inter Sabariam et Carnuntum, quia propter infestationem Sclavorum in pristinis sedibusesse non poterat. Quem imperator benigne suscepit – erat enim capcanus christianus nomine Theodorus – et precibus eius annuens muneribus donatum redire permisit; *Annales Iuvavenses maiores*, 87 (805): hoc anno baptisatus est paganus, vocatus Abraham, 11. Kal. Octobr.; *Annales Sancti Emmerammi*, 93 (805): Cabuanus venit ad domno Carolo, et Abraham cagonus baptizatus super Fiskaha; Pohl 1988a, 205, 302, 322; Szöke 1990–1991, 148; Vida 2002, 181; Kožiak 2011, 152–153; Kardaras 2012, 85.

follow their religious beliefs, as shamanism.¹⁹⁰ The Christian traditions and the relevant symbols documented archaeologically inside the Khaganate prior to the Frankish wars presumably were associated with surviving, small communities of non-Avar Christians and to the Avars must have had only a decorative function.¹⁹¹ To summarize, “without a political decision made by the ruling elites of the Khaganate, neither mass conversions, nor the creation of an extensive and well-established ecclesiastical organisation appear to have taken place”.¹⁹²

190 Roux 1988, 519–522; Pohl 1988a, 200; Daim 2003, 520.

191 Pohl 1988a, 202, 204; Daim 2003, 520–521; Bugarski 2009, 225–229; Curta 2011, 313; Kardaras 2012, 85.

192 Bollók 2017, 436.

The Byzantine Finds and the Possible Channels of Communication between Byzantium and the Avars after 626

5.1 Early Avar Period II

As mentioned in ch. 3.1, the only evidence for contacts between Byzantium and the Avars from 626 until 660 is that of two Byzantine embassies sent in 634/35 to ransom three prominent Byzantine hostages. The Byzantine cultural elements that were present within the Khaganate during the later part of the Early Avar period II (or even shortly after that) cannot therefore be attributed to a constant communication between the two sides. Instead, responsible for the Byzantine influence must be the presence (or survival) in Pannonia of a population of captives who had been forcefully moved into the core area of the Khaganate after the Avar raids. For example, in 595, after the conquest of the city, the khagan “was razing the walls of Singidunum, and was forcing the population to abandon their home and to make settlements in enemy land.”¹ John of Nikiu mentions that the Avars moved the war prisoners taken from the Balkan provinces into the Khaganate after the raid(s) of 609/10.² A large number of people are said to have been transferred to Pannonia after the ambush against Emperor Heraclius in 623. According to George the Monk, the Avars moved to Pannonia 70,000 captives, but Patriarch Nikephoros has 270,000,³ a clearly exaggerated number, as no Byzantine city was occupied.

The presence inside the Khaganate of Byzantine prisoners of war and of their descendants is confirmed by the *episode of Kuver* in the second book of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*.⁴ Kuver, a leader of the Bulgars in Pannonia,

1 See ch. 2.3, n. 55.

2 See ch. 2.5, n. 126.

3 George the Monk, *Chronicle*, 669; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 10, 52: After taking a great many captives, they carried them off to their own country: the total number amounted to 270,000 men and women, as was mutually confirmed by some of the prisoners who escaped; see also Synkellos, *Homily*, 10, 301; *Chronicon Paschale*, 713; Waldmüller 1976, 249, 263; Stratos 1981, 130; Pohl 1988a, 192, 246; Kaegi 2003, 119; Ziemann 2007, 128; Vida 2009, 237.

4 On the identification of Kuver with the fourth son of Kubrat (op. cit., n. 636), see Fine 1983, 44; Horedt 1987, 15; Bálint 1989, 169. Older historians tried to identify Kuver with Kubrat or Chrovatos, assumptions that found no followers later. See Grégoire 1944–1945, 88–118; Maricq 1952, 345–347; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 271; see also Ditten 1978a, 131; Fine 1983, 48; On

clashed with the Avar khagan and, after he won over him for six times, he decided to move south at the head of an ethnically mixed people. He came in contact with Constantinople and asked permission for settlement inside the empire, as well as supplies for his people from the Slavs of the tribe of the Drougouvites. Shortly after that, one of his officials named Maurus, attempted to conquer Thessalonica. As for the people of Kuver, they temporarily settled in the Keramesian plain, which has been located in Pelagonia between Stobi (near Gradsko) and Bitola, in present-day FYROM.⁵ The presence of Kuver in the region was short, for nothing is known about him establishing any polity there.⁶

Of particular significance for the topic of this chapter, however, is the fact that the people of Kuver were descendants of Byzantine captives, who had been mixed with Bulgars, Avars and other peoples, but they have apparently maintained their Christian beliefs and memories of their homeland, so much so wanted to return to the land of their ancestors.⁷ The captives had been taken from many areas of the Byzantine Empire, but were settled by the Avars in the area of Sirmium, hence their name of *Sermesianoï*.⁸ According to the unknown author of Book II of the *Miracles*, the *Sermesianoï* revolted after “about sixty years” since the violent transfer of their parents to Pannonia.⁹ On the basis of those vague chronological indications, various scholars have proposed that the revolt and subsequent migration to the Balkans took place in 678,¹⁰ between

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- the other hand, Patrick Geary (2002, 168), assumes that the names Kubrat, Kuver and Chrovatos indicated initially an Avar title and later became names of persons or peoples.
- 5 *Miracles* I (287–295), 228–231 (Lemerle, *Miracles* II, 148–153); Beševliev 1970, 294–298; idem 1981, 163–169; Avenarius 1973, 26; Gregoriou-Ioannidou 1981, 69–72; Pohl 1988a, 278–279; Kyriakes 1993, 65–68; Ziemann 2007, 136–139; Nikolov 2017, 71 (Kutrigur Bulgars).
 - 6 A traditional view in the Bulgarian historiography, as well as of other historians (see Fine 1983, 46), about the establishment of a small Proto-bulgar state by Kuver in present-day FYROM, almost simultaneously with that of Asparoukh, is not testified by the sources and has been plausibly rejected. See Charanis 1970, 245–247; Gregoriou-Ioannidou 1981, 72–87; on the other hand, Veselin Beševliev (1981, 168), attributes to Kuver the intention to establish a Bulgar-Slavic state.
 - 7 *Miracles* I (285), 228; Beševliev 1970, 287–291; Gregoriou-Ioannidou 1981, 69, 74–75; Pohl 1987, 42; idem 1988a, 192–193, 217; Kyriakes 1993, 66; Ziemann 2007, 136–137; Vida 2008, 31–32.
 - 8 *Miracles* I (284), 228; ibidem (292), 230: ... κελεύσας πάντας τοὺς ἐκ τῶν τοῦ λεχθέντος Κούβερ Σερμησιάνους ἀποφύγους ὑπ’ αὐτὸν τὸν Μαῦρον γενέσθαι; ibidem (302–303), 233; (Lemerle, *Miracles* II, 138–139, 177); Beševliev 1970, 287–289; Ditten 1978a, 130; Pohl 1988a, 192–193; idem 2003, 581; Curta 2006a, 106; Ziemann 2007, 138.
 - 9 *Miracles* I (286), 228; Ziemann 2007, 138.
 - 10 Beševliev 1970, 296; idem 1981, 168–170; Fine 1983, 44–49.

680 and 685,¹¹ or even between 635 and 640.¹² The advocates of the first two solutions rightly see the prisoners of war transferred to Pannonia as captives from the Avar raids taking place between 614 and 623, while proponents of the last solution point to the raids of 578–584. To be sure, many raids of the independent Slavs happened without any transfer of captives, and many cities were taken and destroyed by the Avars between 578 and 584 with no mention of their inhabitants being moved to the Khaganate. On the other hand, Lombard captives were also moved to the Khaganate after the Avar attack on Friuli in 610/11.¹³ At any rate, that the prisoners of war, whose descendants were known as *Sermesianoï*, stayed within the Khaganate for sixty years, offers a possible explanation for the Byzantine cultural elements documented in the material culture of the Early Avar period 11.¹⁴

5.2 Middle Avar Period

The presence of the Byzantine motifs during the Middle Avar period (660–710) is often explained in terms of the migration from the south Russian steppes of the Onogur Bulgars (probably under the leadership of Kuver). Others have pointed to the Avar embassy of 678 to Constantinople, the last evidence of diplomatic contacts between Byzantium and the Avars, which was meant to convey the khagan's congratulations for the Byzantine victory over the Arabs.

As a matter of fact, the embassy of 678 coincides in time with a new surge of Byzantine coins and luxury objects inside the Khaganate. The burials discovered in Ozora-Tótipusztá, particularly that of a male, who is believed to have been a ruler, indicate that members of the Avar elite continued to use Byzantine ornaments well into the second half of the seventh century. In other words, the Avar embassy, as well as a good part of the archaeological record, show the new rapprochement between the Empire and the Avars during the last quarter of the seventh century. This renewal of diplomatic relations strongly suggests that

11 Charanis 1970, 243; Ditten 1978a, 131; Lemerle (*Miracles* 11), 161; Kyriakes 1993, 68.

12 Dvornik 1949, 288; Jenkins 1962, 117. On the views about the dating, see also Charanis 1970, 236 (n. 6), 239–240; Fine 1983, 46.

13 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, iv. 38, 130–131: *Avares vero omnes Langobardos qui iam in virili aetate erant gladio perimunt, mulieres vero et parvulos captivitatis iugo addicunt.... quos tempestas ista captivitatis, de qua nund diximus, comprehendens, omnes ex castro Foroiulensi in Avarorum patriam exsoles deduxit*; Vida 2008, 32; idem 2009, 237. For the attack, see ch. 2.5, n. 130.

14 Garam 1996, 258; Müller 1992, 253–254; Vida 2002, 181; idem 2008, 32, who rejects the possibility of cultural influences by prisoners of war.

a mutual interest existed, either in terms of trade or for political and military reasons. The main reason for that rapprochement may have been the migration of the Bulgars, particularly their temporary settlement in the river Onglos area (southern Bessarabia?)¹⁵ and the subsequent establishment in the lands between the Danube and the Haemus mountains. Péter Somogyi has in fact attributed the new surge of gold coins from Byzantium after 650 to those closer contacts between Constantinople and the Avars. However, since that seems to pre-date the embassy of 678 by more than 25 years, Somogyi believes that the rapprochement dates back to the reign of Constans II, although there is no evidence in the written sources to substantiate that idea. In his view, the flow of gold coins represented payments for potential Avar services, which came to an end once Asparukh and his Bulgars moved to the Northeastern Balkans.¹⁶

The Byzantine-Avar rapprochement may also explain a number of finds on the periphery of the new Bulgar polity, an indication that Constantinople was making diplomatic efforts to surround that with Byzantine clients or, at least, allies. The finds in question are clearly of Byzantine origin (brooches, buckles, earrings with star-shaped pendants, as well as coins) and come especially from Oltenia (Little Walachia) and Walachia, which were at that time inhabited by Slavs. Both Péter Somogyi and Panos Sophoulis reject the idea that the hexagrams found in those regions could be interpreted in terms of trade, and regard them as indication of (tribute) payments for local chieftains, who, at some point after ca. 630 (or 650), but especially after Kubrat's death, chose Byzantium against the Bulgars of Asparukh. However, the Bulgar migration to the Balkans changes the political configuration in the lands north of the Danube, as some of those Slavic tribes may have been incorporated into the Bulgar polity. As a consequence, Byzantine payments to the Walachian Slavs came to an end. Instead, after the treaty of 681, Constantinople began to make payments to the Bulgars. Furthermore, regarding the cease of payments to the Slavs, Somogyi, apart from the monetary crisis of Byzantium in the Dark Ages, rightly points out that hexagrams ceased to be struck at some point between 674 and 681.¹⁷

There can be no dispute over the fact that “whatever the case, a Byzantine-Avar rapprochement seems to have taken place in the third quarter of the seventh century.”¹⁸ However, the issue of the Byzantine coins is far more

15 See Ziemann 2007, 163–167; idem, 2012, 31–43; Fiedler 2008b, 152; Sophoulis 2012, 108–109, with further literature.

16 Avenarius 1985, 1024; Pohl 1988a, 276; Daim 2003, 489, 517; Somogyi 2008b, 126–128, 132–133, 135; Sophoulis 2011, 401.

17 Somogyi 2008b, 133–135, 141–142; Sophoulis 2011, 401–402, 407; on the peripheral Byzantine-Bulgar antagonism in northern Serbia, see Sophoulis, *op. cit.*, 122–123.

18 Somogyi 2008b, 132.

complicated. First, regarding Oltenia and Walachia, the coins before 660s are not clear if they concern an anti-Bulgar alliance, taking into account that as long as Kubrat ruled Great Bulgaria the Byzantines had rather no diplomatic activities against him. In other words, coins struck in the 650s are not a direct reflection of Byzantine-Bulgar relations. Furthermore, although not numerous, the Byzantine coins continued to enter in the Carpathian Basin after 626 as well as after 681, regardless of the new conditions on the Balkans. As mentioned already, apart from the trade relations, all those coins do not concern any regular tribute of Byzantium to the Avars but occasionally payments.

On the other hand, there is no evidence to substantiate Somogyi's interpretation of finds of *solidi* struck after 650 that cluster in the southeastern area of the Avar khaganate. Somogyi believes that "the Avar allies on which the emperor could rely against the Onogur Bulgars were certainly those of the southeastern region, which was also closer to the territories still under Byzantine rule."¹⁹ According to the available evidence, no local political leaders challenged the authority of the khagan prior to late eighth century, when one learns about Iugurru, Tudun, Tarkhan, etc.²⁰ Could the cluster of coin finds truly delineate a power center inside the Khaganate during the Middle Avar period? Finally, although made up of gold and not silver coins, the hoard from the environs of Sofia has no relation to the Byzantine-Avar rapprochement²¹ but should rather be interpreted in reference Byzantine relations to local Slavic tribes.

5.3 Late Avar Period

Recognizing the Byzantine influence on the Avar culture of the Later period is much more complicated than either in the case of the Early or in that of the Middle Avar periods. First, there is no written evidence of diplomatic contacts during the eighth century between Byzantium and the Avars and there is therefore no known context for the occurrence of Byzantine motifs in the Avar art. Moreover, as in the Middle Avar period, Byzantium had no border with the Avars anymore, and next to nothing is known about the possible communication between the two sides. In sharp contrast to that, the archeological finds of the Late Avar period indicate the continuity of relations with Byzantium, but how communication was established between Byzantium and the Avars, and in which way relations were used in the eighth century have so far remained complete unclear issues. As channels of communication have been suggested

19 Ibidem, 128–130.

20 Pohl 1988a, 293–306; Stanciu 2008, 426.

21 See Somogyi 2008b, 132. n. 159.

the northern Italy or the Balkans, however, without any further consideration of how long those channels may have been in use. In any case, reconstructing the Byzantine-Avar relations during the eighth century means finding possibilities of communication between the Mediterranean world and Central Europe, directly linked to the geopolitical situation in Italy, the Balkans and, presumably, in other areas.

5.3.1 *The Byzantine Possessions in Italy*

Some scholars have advanced the idea that the channel of communication between Byzantium and the Avars during the eighth century was the Exarchate of Ravenna, particularly Venice and Istria, which formed a “bridge” of communication from the Adriatic Sea to Western and Central Europe.²² The Byzantine province of Istria, established in the mid-sixth century, had many common points with the Late Roman province *Venetia et Histria*.²³ The provincial boundaries, along the coast, reached the fjord of Plomin (Fianona), passed north of the Ucka (Monte Maggiore) up to Kastav, a fortress north of Rijeka, and continued towards Snežnik (Schneeberg), Javornik, Nanos and San Giovanni.²⁴ Towards the end of the sixth century, the late Roman administrative model changed. Istria was divided into *civitates* (both important cities and episcopal sees, e.g. Pula, Trieste, Poreč) and *castella* (fortified towns, e.g. Piran, Umag, Rovinj, Labin, Nezakcij), which became the base of the new military elite.²⁵

Istria belonged to the Exarchate of Ravenna, and its center was in present-day Trieste. The military forces were under the command of a *magister militum*, who probably resided in Pula. The latter appointed lower officials, controlled the local administration, dispensed judgment, and supervised the tax collection. The smaller towns were governed by *tribuni*, who by the late seventh century have become the most powerful persons in urban communities.²⁶ Civil and military power was exercised in the name of the Byzantine government by *iudices provinciarum* and *iudices militares*, respectively.²⁷ The economy of Istria was based on trade. During the reign of Justinian the so-called *limes maritimus* came into being, “a chain of forts which dotted the peaks of islands situated along eastern Adriatic coast.” As Vedran Bileta points out, “the relative apathy

22 Verhulst 1995, 506–507; Daim 2000, 193–194; idem 2001, 165, 168; idem 2003, 522; Somogyi 2014, 81–82.

23 Ferluga 1992, 391; Štih 2010, 197; Bileta 2011, 106.

24 Ferluga 1992, 391; Štih 2010, 197–198.

25 Ferluga 1992, 393; Bileta 2011, 113.

26 Ferluga 1992, 393–394; Bileta 2011, 111–114.

27 Bileta 2011, 106.

concerning non-fiscal provincial matters on the part of the government, however, meant that a high degree of local autonomy existed, particularly as the empire was preoccupied with the defense of the eastern frontier.”²⁸ On the other hand, Trieste and its environs constituted a special political and military unit – a *numerus* with between 200 and 400 men under a *tribunus* – which formed the northern zone of Istria’s defense in the sixth and seventh centuries against the attacks of the Avars, the Slavs, and the Lombards. The organization of the *numerus* of Trieste, which took place probably in the late sixth and was completed during the seventh century, shared similarities to that of the *limitanei* in the Late Roman Empire.²⁹

With the exception of a brief period during which it was under the rule of the Ostrogoths, Istria remained in Byzantine hands until 751, when the Lombards occupied it after the fall of the Exarchate of Ravenna. The Byzantines reoccupied Istria from 774 until 788, when the Franks defeated the Lombards, and a part of the Frankish army arrived in Friuli. Through the treaty of Aachen in 812, Venice, the Slavic populations on the coasts of Istria and modern Slovenia as well as the Croats of Dalmatia and southern Pannonia became subjects of the Franks, while Byzantium maintained its coastal possessions in Dalmatia.³⁰ In the early eighth century, however, the Byzantine rule was disputed in some areas of the Exarchate. In the revolt of 726–727 against the iconoclastic policy of Emperor Leo III (717–741), locally elected *duces* replaced the imperial authorities, while Venice seceded from the Empire and elected its own *dux*. On the other hand, the local military aristocracy of Istria remained loyal to the Empire.³¹

Erich, the duke of Friuli, was murdered in Tarsatica (now Trsat, near Rijeka) by residents in the city. He was preparing to campaign in Pannonia, in order to quell the Avar revolt of 799.³² Some scholars have advanced the idea that Byzantium incited the residents of Tarsatica in order to support the rebellion of the Avars.³³ But this is a doubtful assumption, for the Byzantines had no

28 Ibidem 115–116.

29 See Ferluga 1992, 394–395; Krahwinkler 1992, 231–236, 243; Belke and Soustal 1995, 165, n. 343; Curta 2006a, 98–99; Bileta 2011, 113–114.

30 Ferluga 1992, 392, 396–397; Krahwinkler 1992, 179–181, 199–200; Brown 1995, 327, 338; Curta 2006a, 99–100; Petrinec 2010, 201, who believes that the border between Byzantine and the Frankish empires was the river Cetina; Dzino 2010, 177–179; Budak 2015, 37–38. On the Byzantine art in Istria, see Vicelja-Matijašić 2005, 185–204.

31 Bileta 2011, 111, 116.

32 *Annales Fuldenses*, 352 (799): Ehericus dux Foroiuliensis iuxta Tarsaticam Liburniae civitatem insidiis oppidanorum occisus est; Krahwinkler 1992, 152–153; Dzino 2010, 183.

33 Katičić 1985, 303, n. 18; Wolfram 1985, 133–134, n. 193; Pohl 1988a, 321; see also Dzino 2010, 183, n. 26.

reason to risk a conflict with Charlemagne in an area under Frankish control. Moreover, Byzantium had already lost its possibilities of communication with the Avar khaganate and could not dissuade the suppression of the Avar uprising (799–803).

Apart from the lack of testimonies on diplomatic relations between the Byzantines and the Avars during the eighth century, it should be noted that in the written sources there is also no information on communication or trade activity between the Khaganate and the area of the Adriatic Sea.³⁴ Although the spread of Byzantine motifs to the Avars via Byzantine Italy is a logical assumption, it remains unknown for how long after 626 was that the channel of communication between Byzantium and the Avars. One is reminded here that that possibility depended upon Byzantine relations with the Lombards, for the part of the Italian peninsula that was closest to the Avar lands was within the Lombard Duchy of Friuli. The latter stretched up to the Julian Alps to the north and to Upper Pannonia in the east, while in the south it bordered the Byzantine possessions of Venice and Istria.³⁵

Because of the geographical location of the Duchy, any Byzantine envoys going either to the Avars or to the Slavic tribes of Carinthia and Lower Austria had to cross the territory of Friuli, as well as the Eastern Alps. The most important artery that linked Istria, Venice, and Friuli with Carinthia and the Upper Drava was *Via Julia Augusta*, which branched off from the river Fella in the Norician Alps. One branch of the road led through the Plöckenpaß (Mons Crucis) to Innsbruck, while another led to Virunum through the Saifnitzpaß and Kanaltal, and continued north until reaching Lauriacum on the Danube (near present-day Enns).³⁶ On the other hand, the connection between Italy and Pannonia led from Aquileia (later Venice) to Emona (Ljubljana), Celeia, Poetovio (Ptuj), Savaria, Scarabantia, before reaching Carnuntum. Its section between Aquileia and Emona (the *Via Gemina*) connected the Po valley and the Adriatic with the Sava and the Lower Drava.³⁷ A number of Lombard finds have recently come to light in present-day Slovenia. Those of particular value are in the area of the river Sava as well as along the roads from Emona to Celeia and from Siscia to Emona, respectively, which suggests that the Lombards controlled communications between the Adriatic Sea and Pannonia.³⁸ One further indication of the activity of merchants or craftsmen along this road network

34 Claude 1985, 138–140, 162; Daim 2001, 161.

35 Krahwinkler 1992, 11.

36 Csendes 1965, 291–292; Callies 1973, 196; Krahwinkler 1992, 15–16.

37 Csendes 1965, 292; Callies 1973, 196; Claude 1985, 137; Krahwinkler 1992, 17; Vavřínek 2004, 393.

38 Ciglenečki 2005, 265–275.

is that cast and gilded parts of the belt-sets imported into the Avar khaganate appear mainly along the old Roman roads of Pannonia.³⁹

The possible use of those roads by the Byzantines can not disregard their relations with the Lombards. Following Byzantine embassy in 623/24 from Heraclius (and not Maurice, as Fredegar notes) to the Lombard king Adaloald (616–626),⁴⁰ there was a period of peace until Rotharius (636–652) took the Lombard throne. Rotharius attacked and occupied the Byzantine Liguria in 643. After that, no hostilities are mentioned until 663, when Emperor Constans II attempted to break down the Lombard Duchy of Benevento in southern Italy, but was defeated by the Lombard king Grimoald (662–671).⁴¹

The Byzantine-Lombard relations improved during the reign of Perctarit (671–687), who concluded a treaty with Byzantium in 678, the year in which the Avar envoys came to Constantinople. The peace was maintained through the reign of Cunipert (687–712), and came to an end only under Liutprand (712–744), who attacked the Exarchate of Ravenna in 713, 717, 727/28 and 740–743. His anti-Byzantine policy was followed by his successors, Ratchis (744–749) and Aistulf, who finally occupied the Exarchate in its entirety in 751.⁴²

Potential communications with the Avars via Friuli during the first half of the eighth century must have been made difficult by conflicts between the dukes of Friuli and the Slavic tribes who lived farther to the east (706, 720 and 739).⁴³ Since the early seventh century, the dukes had attempted to control the neighbouring Slavs. By 625/27, the dukes of Friuli Taso and Cacco, sons of Gisulf II, attacked the area of Zellia, in Val Canale, located in modern Carinthia. The military success of the dukes forced for the first time the local Slavic tribes to pay tribute to Friuli. The Slavs remained tributaries until the rule of Ratchis (ca. 738), the later Lombard king, and after that Carantania probably incorporated those tribes.⁴⁴ Because during the conflict between Dagobert

39 Daim 2001, 164–165 believes that Keszthely was an important junction in Pannonia during the eighth century.

40 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV. 49, 210: Ipsoque anno 40. Chlotharie Adloaldus rex Langobardorum, filius Agone regi, cum patri suo successisset in regno, legato Mauricio imperatoris nomen Eusebio ingeniose ad se venientem benigne suscepit; (ibidem, 210, n. 74–75); Lounghis 1980, 107–108 (in 624/25); Christou 1991, 190–191.

41 Jarnut 1982, 57–60; Christou 1991, 195, 204–210; Christie 1998, 95–97.

42 Jarnut 1982, 86–93, 110; Christie 1998, 100–105; Antonopoulos 2010, 89–92; Bileta 2011, 111, who notes that after the Lombard conquest of the Exarchate, exarch control was limited to the city of Ravenna and its immediate surroundings.

43 Bertels 1987, 111–113.

44 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV, 38, 132: Mortuo, ut diximus, Gisulfo duce Foroiulensi, Taso et Cacco, filii eius, eundem ducatum regendum susceperunt. Hi suo tempore Sclavorum regionem quae Zellia appellatur usque ad locum qui Medaria dicitur

and Samo in 631, the Lombards, allied with the Franks, attacked the Alpine Slavs,⁴⁵ some have associated the operations of the Friulian dukes to the Lombard support of Dagobert.⁴⁶ In 642, a naval raid is recorded, most likely of the Dalmatian Slavs, who attacked Sipontum, at that time part of the Lombard Duchy of Benevento.⁴⁷ The Slavs of the eastern Alpine region were defeated ca. 663 by Wechtari, the duke of Friuli.⁴⁸ The Upper Sava region is referred by Paul the Deacon, the main source of those events, as *Sclavorum patria* during the conflict of duke Ratchis with the Slavs in 738.⁴⁹

Because of the often hostile relations between Byzantium and the Lombards, neither Istria, nor Venice could serve as a long-term channel of communication with the Avar khaganate. Peaceful relations of the Byzantines with the Lombards after the reign of Heraclius were restricted to the years between 643 and 663, namely from the Lombard attack on Liguria until Constans II's arrival in Italy, then, again, from 671/78 to 712. Thus, the *terminus post quem* for the interruption of the any possible communications with the Avars via the Byzantine possessions in Italy is Liutprand's ascension to the Lombard throne. Peaceful relations with the Lombards therefore coincide with the Early Avar period II (626/30–660) as well as the Middle one (660–710). It is only during those two periods the Byzantine possessions in Italy could have served as intermediary for the transmission of Byzantine motifs to the Avar art.

However, if the Byzantine-Avar contacts via the Duchy of Friuli came to an end in 712, then the transfer of iconoclastic motifs to the Khaganate from the

possiderunt; Kollautz 1965b, 626, 638; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 11, 404 (in 620/21); Waldmüller 1976, 286–288; Wolfram 1985, 127, n. 153; Bertels 1987, 99–100, 106; Pohl 1988a, 259–260; Krahwinkler 1992, 45; Fritze 1994, 108–109; Christie 1998, 94; Eggers 2001, 74; Curta 2001a, 110; Štih 2010, 104, 114.

45 Fredegarius, *Chronica*, IV, 68, 236: ubi trebus turmis falange super Wenedus exercitus ingreditur, etiam et Langobardi solucione Dagoberti idemque osteleter in Sclavos perixerunt.... Langobardi idemque victuriam optenuerunt, et pluremum nummerum captivorum de Sclavos Alamanni et Langobardi secum duxerunt; *Gesta Dagoberti*, 27, 410; Waldmüller 1976, 299; Bertels 1987, 103–106; Pohl 1988a, 259–260; Krahwinkler 1992, 45–46; Fritze 1994, 90–91; Eggers 2001, 73; Štih 2010, 114–115; Broome 2014, 105.

46 Klebel 1960, 667–668; Fräss-Ehrfeld 1984, 50–51, who asserted that the Friulian dukes occupied lands in Kanaltal and Gailtal of Carinthia; see also Pohl 1988a, 430, n. 42.

47 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV 44, 135 (642); *Chronicle of S. Benedicti*, 487: Aio sedit ann. 1, mens. 5. Iste dimicavit cum Sclavis ad Aufidum, et interfecerunt illum per ingenium; Waldmüller 1976, 347; Curta 2001a, 110; Dzino 2010, 98, who considers the Slavs as being under Byzantine service (mercenaries).

48 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, V 23, 152–153; Curta 2001a, 110.

49 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, VI 52, 183; Ratchis denique apud Foroiuli dux, ut dixeramus, effectus, in Carniolam Sclavorum patriam cum suis ingressus, magnam multitudinem Sclavorum interficiens, eorum omnia devastavit; Štih 2010, 149.

western Mediterranean region must also be rejected. Although in 732 Emperor Leo III gave the Patriarchate of Constantinople jurisdiction over Calabria, Sicily, Crete, and Illyricum, including Dalmatia and Istria,⁵⁰ the hostile relations with the Lombards prevented the Byzantine influences of the iconoclastic period from reaching Pannonia via the Exarchate of Ravenna.

5.3.2 *The Bulgar Khaganate and the Byzantine-Bulgar Treaty of 716*

During the Middle Avar period, and only three years after the last Avar embassy to Constantinople, the Bulgar khaganate (the so-called “First Bulgarian State”) was established in the Northeastern Balkans. The third son of Kubrat, Asparukh (635/40–c. 700), followed by a group of the people from “Great Bulgaria,” abandoned his homeland, now under Khazar rule, and moved westward. After he crossed the rivers Dnieper and Dniester, he settled in Bessarabia, probably between 670 and 680. A little later, in 681, he defeated the army of Emperor Constantine IV and settled in the lands between the Danube and the Haemus’ mountains.⁵¹

The Bulgar khaganate of Asparukh, which stretched from the estuaries of the Dniester to the Haemus, included Bessarabia, parts of Walachia, Dobroudja, and the former Roman province of Lower Moesia between the Black Sea and the river Oescus (Iskär), later to the river Timok. The political and economic center of the new khaganate was on the east side, where later the first capital, Pliska, was founded.⁵² According to the evidence of the *Armenian Geography* (seventh century), Asparukh clashed with the Avars, possibly between 680 and 685. The Avars were driven out from the area south of the Lower Danube and the western boundaries of the Bulgars reached the Iron Gates, thus restraining the territory under Avar control.⁵³ As to the Slavs of Moesia, Theophanes mentions that the Bulgars settled the Severeis on their frontier with Byzantium, to the mountain pass of Beregava (Rish Pass), and moved six of the so-called

50 Brown 1995, 325–326; Goldstein 1996, 258; idem 1999, 170.

51 Chrysos 1972–1973, 7–13; Ferluga 1984, 50, 53; Kyriakes 1993, 50–53, 162–174; Ziemann 2007, 161–163; Fiedler 2008b, 152–154; Sophoulis 2012, 90, 107–112; Nikolov 2017, 70.

52 Fine 1983, 67–69; Shepard 1995, 229; Curta 2006a, 79–81; Sophoulis 2012, 56, 69. On the first Bulgarian capital, see Ziemann 2007, 317–332; Fiedler 2008b, 169–191; Georgiev 2014, 194–221; see also Sophoulis, op. cit., 60–65 with further literature, and the volume *Post-Roman Towns* 2, ch. v.

53 *Armenian Geography* 111, 9, p. 48: There are two mountains [in Thrace] and one river, the Danube, which has six tributaries and which forms a lake, and an island called Peuce. On this island lives Asparuk, son of Kubrat, a fugitive from the Khazars from the mountains of the Bulgars, who expelled the Avar nation and settled there; According to the editor of the source (p. 94, n. 98), “this passage is probably an interpolation into the original text”; Maricq 1952, 343; Gjuzev 1996, 20; Pohl 1988a, 277; Bálint 1996, 230.

Seven Tribes to their frontier with the Avars.⁵⁴ On the other hand, Michael the Syrian projected the Bulgar settlement in the Balkans back into the age of Emperor Maurice, a testimony which looks also as an anachronism.⁵⁵

Alexandru Madgearu points to the *Armenian Geography* (a work he attributes to Moses Chorenac'i, but which was most likely written by Ananias Širakac'i). According to his interpretation of that source, the Avars settled on the island of Peuce, close to the mouths of the Danube.⁵⁶ At stake is a misunderstanding of the source, for the clash between the Bulgars, who occupied that area, and the Avars is not linked to Peuce. First, the marshes of Peuce offered a temporary refuge to Asparukh before his attack on the Byzantines. Second, his clash with the Avars took place in the Moesia II, where the Bulgars later moved the so-called *Seven Tribes* as a buffer against the Avars. One is also reminded here that Peuce was associated in the fifth century to the migration of a part of the Huns in the aftermath of the battle of Nedao.⁵⁷ Furthermore, on the basis of gold and silver coins struck for the emperors Heraclius, Constans II and Constantine IV, Madgearu argues that after 626 the – supposedly – settled in Dobrudja Avars escaped from the central power of the khagan and actually formed an independent Avar polity.⁵⁸ However, since most finds are from forts and sites next to the Danube (Galați, Isaccea, Histria, Niculițel etc.), they are most likely related to the operations of the Byzantine fleet, a possibility that Madgearu himself entertained: “the Byzantine navy continued to exert its control along the Danube up to Durostorum ... Recently, at Nufăru was found a seal of Kyriakos (exconsul), dated in 696–697, which shows that the mouths

54 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 36, 90; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 359 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 499): Having, furthermore, subjugated the so-called Seven Tribes of the neighbouring Sklavinian nations, they settled the Severeis from the forward mountain pass of Beregaba in the direction of the east, and the remaining six tribes, which were tributary to them, in the southern and western regions as far as the land of the Avars; Kyriakes 1993, 53–62; Gjuzelev 1996, 18; Ziemann 2007, 168–169; Fiedler 2008b, 154; Sophoulis 2012, 69.

55 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* II, 10, 21, 363: Lorsqu'ils arrivèrent aux frontières des Romains, l'un d'entre eux, appelé Bulgarios, prit dix mille hommes et se sépara de ses frères. Il franchit le fleuve Tanaïs, dans la direction du Danube, qui lui aussi se perd dans la mer du Pont; et il fit demander à Mauricius de lui donner un pays pour s'y fixer et devenir les auxiliaires des Romains. L'empereur lui donna la Moesie supérieure cela, il fut chassé de l'Église; Pohl 1988a, 277.

56 Madgearu 2007, 272.

57 Jordanes, *Getica*, L 266, 127: ... Hernac quoque iunior Attilae filius cum suis in extrema minoris Scythiae sedes delegit. Emnetzur et Ultzindur consanguinei eius in Dacia ripense Uto et Hisco Almoque potiti sunt ...; Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 113–114, 280; Wirth 1999, 114–115; Ziemann 2007, 29, 52.

58 Madgearu 2007, 271–272.

of the Danube remained under the control of the Byzantine navy after 680.⁵⁹ Furthermore, no example exists in the entire history of the Avar khaganate of a polity separate from the political center in the Carpathian Basin. What is observed, is a gradual expansion to immediate neighboring areas.

Some scholars believe that the establishment of the Bulgar khaganate in the Balkans put an end to the contacts between Byzantium and the Avars, because the Bulgars now blocked all ways of communication with the Carpathian Basin.⁶⁰ According to Josephine Blei, the events of 681 in the Balkans led even to the weakening of the Avar khaganate.⁶¹ On the other hand, certain scholars have claimed that the Bulgar settlement had no negative impact on the Byzantine-Avar relations.⁶²

True, the Bulgars occupied a key territory in the Balkans, and with that controlled a number of important Roman and Early Byzantine roads linking Constantinople and Thrace with the areas north of Haemus and the Danube. The most important among them were the road from Nicopolis ad Istrum to Adrianople via of Beroe; "Trajan's road" from Oescus to Philippopolis; the two roads linking Marcianopolis to Anchialos and Odessos (Varna) to Mesembria, respectively; the coastal road from Odessos to Tomis; the road between Noviodunum and Marcianopolis across Dobrudja; the "Danube road" from Singidunum to Ad Stoma; and the road from Naissus to Ratiaria.⁶³ On the other hand, there were other routes across the Balkans, in the direction of the Carpathian Basin, which did not run through the area of the Bulgar settlement. For example, the *Via Militaris*, later known as the "imperial road," ran from Singidunum to Constantinople via Viminacium, Naissus (Niš), Serdica, Philippopolis, and Adrianople, with a southern branch linking Serdica to Thessalonica.⁶⁴

Besides land routes, two waterways in the Balkans were partially navigable, i.e. the valleys of the rivers Morava and Axios, which were beyond the reach of the Bulgars, offered access to Thessalonica by way of Bitola or Strumica, as well as to Constantinople through Philippopolis. Also to Thessalonica led the

59 Ibidem, 272.

60 Vinski 1971, 377; Pohl 1988a, 181; Bálint 1989, 172; McCormick 1995, 358; Daim 2001, 165, 168; Vavřínek 2004, 400–401.

61 Blei 2013, 68.

62 Kiss 1991, 122; Daim 2000, 190; idem 2003, 504; on the views about the interruption, or not, of communication, see also Bóna 1971, 292; Winter 2000, 46–47.

63 Beševliev 1969, 484–492; Skrivanić 1977, 126–129; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 2001, 55; Wendel 2005, 225–229, 242–254; Sophoulis 2012, 55. On the road network north of the Lower Danube, see Sophoulis, op. cit., 115.

64 Beševliev 1969, 491; Skrivanić 1977, 120–122; Fine 1983, 3; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 2001, 53–54; Wendel 2005, 74–141, 153–159; Sophoulis 2012, 55–56.

axis Oescus/Iskär-Strymon, the northern part of which was in Bulgar hands.⁶⁵ Far from the Bulgar settlement was also the Via Egnatia, which connected Dyrrachium (Durrës) to Constantinople.⁶⁶ Whether any of those roads were still in use by the time the Bulgars settled in the Balkans remains unclear, taking into account the conditions in the Balkans since the reign of Heraclius. In other words, it is beyond doubt that several decades before the arrival of the Bulgars, the Central and Northern Balkans were out of Byzantine control and the communication with areas north of the Danube through the Balkans had been cut off before the coming of Asparukh. No traffic along the Balkan roads is mentioned in the sources and it is not even certain which routes were used either by Kuver's *Sermesiano*i or the Avar envoys who came to Constantinople in 678.⁶⁷

Following the peace treaty of 681, the Byzantine-Bulgar relations seem to have been peaceful until 688, when Emperor Justinian II attacked the Slavs in the valley of the river Strymon, as well as the Bulgars, to reach Thessalonica. On his way back, however, the imperial army was attacked by the Bulgars and largely destroyed.⁶⁸ The sources provide no testimony on the relations between the two sides for the period 688–704. In 705, Justinian II regained the throne in Constantinople with the assistance of khagan Tervel (701–718), successor of Asparukh. Tervel entered Constantinople to receive the title of Caesar. The two rulers then clashed in 708/09, but good relations were restored in 711. In 712, the Bulgars raided Thrace, and in 717/18 they helped the Byzantines during the Arab siege of Constantinople.⁶⁹

An important element in the study of the Byzantine-Avar relations during the eighth century is the treaty of 716 concluded between Emperor Theodosius III (715–717) and the Bulgar khagan Kormesios (716/21–738). This was definitely a treaty favorable to the Bulgars, for in 812 khagan Krum asked the Byzantine Emperor Michael I Rangabes (811–813) for its renewal.⁷⁰ The treaty settled the question of the frontiers as well as the trade relations

65 Lemerle, *Miracles* 11, 175; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 2001, 54–55; Sedlar 1994, 334–335.

66 Skrivanić 1977, 122–126; Fine 1983, 3; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 2001, 52; Sophoulis 2012, 56.

67 On the possible way of Kuver, see Werner 1986, 21 (valley of Morava-Axios, through Niš and Skopje); Ovčarov 1987, 177 (descent from Pannonia to Keramesian plain through Sava, western Serbia, Bosnia and Albania). For Werner's idea (op. cit.) that the hoard found in Vrap (Albania) must be associated with Kuver, see Stadler 1996a, 432–438; Daim 2000, 94–107; Ziemann 2007, 139–140; Fiedler 2008a, 137–140; on the Vrap-Velino group of belt fittings, see Fiedler 2008b, 218–220; Szenthe 2014, 61–75; Daskalov 2017, 47–48.

68 Head 1972, 36, 41; Kyriakes 1993, 63–64; Ziemann 2007, 180–182; Sophoulis 2012, 90.

69 Head 1972, 124; Kyriakes 1993, 73–80; Ziemann 2007, 182–188, 198–201, 205–210; Fiedler 2008b, 191–192; Vachkova 2008, 345–346; Luttwak 2009, 173–175; Sophoulis 2012, 90–91.

70 Kyriakes 1993, 183; Ziemann 2007, 202–204; Sophoulis 2012, 228.

of the Empire with the Bulgars. The Byzantine-Bulgar frontier was traced across the hills of Meleones (Bakadzhik) at the upper flow of the river Tundzha (now Provadiia), between the Haemus and the Antihaemus, while the refugees from either side, including those wanted for treason, had to be returned. Furthermore, the Byzantines promised to offer to the Bulgar ruler an annual tribute of “vestments and red dyed hides to the value of 30 lbs. of gold.” The relevant to the economic relations fourth clause of the treaty also required that “those who traded in both countries should be certified by means of diplomas and seals. Anyone not having seals would lose his assets which would be confiscated by the Treasury”.⁷¹

The latter clause implies that there was a flourishing trade relations between Byzantium and Bulgaria. As initially Geza Féher put it, this opens the possibility that through the treaty of 716, the Byzantines obtained the right of transit, i.e., the ability to move goods through Bulgaria to other areas, either north of the Danube, where the Avar khaganate was located, or even to the West.⁷² If so, then the establishment of the Bulgar khaganate, with the imposition of a state power on the northeastern part of the Balkans, facilitated the restoration of the trade relations between Byzantium and the areas north of the Danube, as long as the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations were good.

Considering the second clause of the treaty (vestments and dyed red hides for the Bulgar khagan), similar garments from Byzantium, and probably various other gifts, continued to reach the Avars as well. That much results from a brief description of the Avar hoard that fell into the hands of the Franks in 796: “fifteen carts full of gold, silver and silk vestments (*pallia holoserica*) were loaded, and each cart was drawn by four oxen.”⁷³ Those were most likely Byzantine vestments, which had been reached the Avar khagans either by trade or donations. Apart from Byzantium, Arnulf Kollautz believed that some of the silk textiles in the Carpathian Basin are of Chinese origin,⁷⁴ but no any other scholar developed later such an assumption.

71 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 497 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 681); Ferluga 1987, 620–621; Kyriakes 1993, 183–184; Curta 2006a, 83; Ziemann 2007, 204; Sophoulis 2012, 229–232.

72 Féher 1954, 59.

73 *Ex vetustis Annalibus Nordhumbranis*, 155: Idem rex fortissimos Karolus cum manu valida Hunorum gentem armis vastando subegerat, eorum principe fugato, et ipsius exercitu superato vel perempto, sublatis inde xv. plaustris auro argentoque paliisque olosericis preciosis repletis, quorum quodque quattor trahebant boves; *Annales Einhardi*, 182–183 (a. 796): Sed et Heiricus dux Foroiuliensis misit hominibus sui seum Wonomyro Sclavo in Pannonias hringum gentis Avarorum ... thesaurum priscorum regum multa seculorum prolixitate collectum domno regi Carolo ad Aquispalatium misit ...; Claude 1985, Handel, 162; Pohl 1988a, 181; idem 1988b, 263; Hardt 2007, 110; Luttwak 2009, 156.

74 Kollautz 1970, 37.

The treaty of 716 restored the trade activity in the Balkans, after many urban centers on the Danube and in the interior had been destroyed in the early seventh century.⁷⁵ Now having a channel of communication through Bulgar territory, the Byzantines renewed their trade relations with the Avars for the next four decades, until 756, when the twenty years' war of Emperor Constantine V (741–775) against the Bulgars broke out.⁷⁶ A temporary restoration of trade relations between Byzantium and the Bulgars is possible during the reign of Leo IV (775–780) and the joint reign of Constantine VI and Irene (namely up to 788), as the hostilities were suspended.⁷⁷

Between 716 and 756, therefore, many ornamental motifs of the Byzantine art during the Iconoclastic Controversy, reached *Avaria* through the Bulgarian territory. The depictions of animals and plants that are so predominant in the decoration of Late Avar belt fittings are linked to Byzantine art, for after 726 the iconoclast emperors forbade the worship of images and the representations of humans.⁷⁸ The iconoclastic motifs drew inspiration from ancient mythology, various elements of which had survived mainly in the profane art of Byzantium.⁷⁹ During the iconoclastic period, the art of Byzantium has much in common to that of the Umayyads, who decorated their palaces with hunting scenes, animals, birds, and plants.⁸⁰

The archeological record of Bulgaria strongly suggests that the area between the Haemus and the Lower Danube became an intermediate cultural space for the Balkans and the Carpathian Basin. A number of eighth-century finds from Bulgaria, such as the gold belt mount from Madara, with its granulated ornament and geometric motifs, or the strap with enamel decoration found in Varna, illustrate the cultural relations with Byzantium, and have parallels in Avar-age assemblages.⁸¹ As Falko Daim has pointed out, despite its limited political influence during the eighth century, the Avar khaganate was not culturally isolated but was maintaining contacts with Italy, the Balkans, and

75 Claude 1985, 162–164.

76 On the campaigns of Constantine V in Bulgaria, see Beševliev 1981, 207–226, 105–107; Kyriakes 1993, 81–91; Shepard 1995, 232–233; Ziemann 2007, 213–234; Sophoulis 2012, 92–95.

77 See Kyriakes 1993, 91–94; Ziemann 2007, 234–235; Sophoulis 2012, 146–150, 162–172, esp. 149 for the trade.

78 Grabar 1984, 180–181; Dagron 1994, 99, 113, 38–40.

79 See Weitzmann 1984.

80 Grabar 1984, 186; Moraitou 2012, 223–225.

81 Haralambieva 1997, 20; Daim 2000, 155–158; Sophoulis 2011, 404, n. 25; Daskalov 2017, 41–54; see also Fiedler 2008a, 127–141, who dates the gold mount to 600–630 and rejects any cultural contact between the Bulgars and the Carpathian Basin during the Middle Avar period.

the Black Sea.⁸² The Avars must have engaged in trade activity, for those cultural influences to reach them. According to the tenth-century *Suda lexicon*, one of the reasons for the decline of their Khaganate was that the Avars “were all merchants and cheating each other.”⁸³ Moreover, the artifacts dated to the early ninth century in Bulgaria, and showing the influence of the Byzantine art, may be partially explained in terms of the Krum’s campaign of 803/04 against the Avars, either as transfer of population or as war booty.⁸⁴

5.3.3 *The Byzantine Crimea*

Another possible way of transferring Byzantine motifs to the Avar khaganate during the Late Avar period, the importance of which has not yet been considered, is the trade network leading from the area north of the Black Sea to Central Europe. In this case, the activity of the Byzantine merchants would have as base the Byzantine possessions in Crimea, which played a great role in shaping the Byzantine foreign policy north of the Black Sea and in Ciscaucasia.⁸⁵

The Black Sea region was of special importance for the transfer of Byzantine elements to the Middle Danube during the Early and Middle Avar periods, because of the migration of nomadic peoples that had already come in contact with the Byzantine civilization. Regarding the Late Avar period, no such migration is mentioned in the sources. Furthermore, during the eighth century, the lands north of the Black Sea came under the control of another nomadic people, the Khazars. The latter occupied initially northeastern Ciscaucasia and the steppes between the Sea of Azov and the Lower Volga, but after the destruction of “Great Bulgaria” their power expanded to the Dnieper River and to the Crimea.⁸⁶

In the eighth century, therefore, the Byzantine trade with the steppe lands and the world beyond them directly depended upon the Byzantine relations with the Khazars, who claimed control over Crimea. The Khazar invasion of the peninsula in c. 660 caused major destruction in the city of Bosphorus.⁸⁷ The written sources testify to the presence of the Khazars in Crimea in the early eighth century. A Khazar governor is mentioned by Patriarch Nikephoros, while under the year 704 Theophanes mentions an *archon* of Bosphorus named

82 Daim 2000, 103–107, 155–158; idem 2003, 522; Szenthe 2015a, 238–242; idem 2016, 358–359.

83 *Suda lexicon* I, B 423, 484; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 239; Claude 1985, 161–162; Pohl 1988a, 198; Sophoulis 2011, 405; idem 2012, 181.

84 See Sophoulis 2012, 181–182.

85 See ch. 1.1, n. 6.

86 Haussig 1988, 43–45; Noonan 1992, 123–124; idem 2007, 219–220; Howard-Johnston 2007, 164.

87 Aibabin 2006, 32–35; idem 2013, 61; Sophoulis 2012, 108–109.

Valgitzis, and a deputy of the Khagan in Phanagoria named Papatzis.⁸⁸ Under 710/11, both sources refer to the *Tudun*, a high-ranking administrative and fiscal Khazar official residing in Cherson.⁸⁹

Following hostilities with the Khazars during the second reign of Justinian II (705–711), who had earlier married Busir Glavan (Theodora), the sister of the Khazar khagan,⁹⁰ the Byzantine-Khazar relations returned to normal during the era of Leo III. After the destruction of “Great Bulgaria”, the Byzantines were interested in relying on the Khazars for the control of the East European steppe lands, while both the Byzantines and the Khazars encountered the Arabic expansion.⁹¹ In c. 730, Emperor Leo III sent an embassy to the Khazars suggesting the marriage of his son and successor, Constantine V, with Tzitzak, the daughter of the Khagan. The marriage took place in 732/33, and the Khazar princess was baptized as Irene.⁹² The good relations between the two sides continued until ca. 760, when the Khazars gradually turned to the Arabs, and even participated in joint campaigns against Byzantium. In 786, the Khazars assisted Leo, the grandson of the khagan, who was a local ruler, to shake off the Byzantine domination in Abasgia (modern Abkhazia). In turn, the Byzantines may have supported the anti-Khazar revolt in the Crimea led by bishop John of Gothia (784–787). Although unsuccessful, the revolt triggered a Khazar invasion in Crimea and the occupation of the city of Doros.⁹³

The Khazar khaganate was strategically positioned at the western part of the so-called “northern Silk Road.”⁹⁴ As Farda Asadov has noted, “for three centuries, starting in the mid-seventh century, the Khazar khaganate controlled the key hubs of the Silk Road arteries and profited from the transit advantages of these vast territories.”⁹⁵ No surprise, therefore, that Byzantium developed

88 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 42, 100; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 373; Aibabin 2006, 46; idem 2013, 61.

89 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 45, 108–110; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 378 (Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 527): As for Toudounos, who was governor of Cherson and representative of the Chagan ...; ibidem, 379; Golden 2011b, 152; idem 2011c, 235; Aibabin 2011, 182.

90 Noonan 1992, 112–113; Kralides 2003, 90–97; Howard-Johnston 2007, 168; Vachkova 2008, 352; Luttwak 2009, 137–138; Aibabin 2011, 180.

91 Noonan 1992, 129–130; Kralides 2003, 100–101; Howard-Johnston 2007, 164, 167, 173–174; Vachkova 2008, 351–352; Golden 2011a, 75, 101–102.

92 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 63, 130; Theophanes, *Chronography*, 409–410; Noonan 1992, 113; Kralides 2003, 99–100; Howard-Johnston 2007, 168; Zuckermann 2007, 432; Vachkova 2008, 352; Luttwak 2009, 138; Aibabin 2011, 192; Golden 2011a, 115 (in 732); idem 2011b, 152–153.

93 Noonan 1992, 113–114, 126; idem 2007, 233–234; Kralides 2003, 101–103, 201; Howard-Johnston 2007, 169–170; Golden 2011b, 153; Albrecht 2016, 376–377.

94 See ch. 1.2, n. 34.

95 Asadov 2012, 140.

commercial relations with the Khazars during the eighth century, in order to secure the transport of the silk to and from the Byzantine Empire. Chinese and Soghdian silks dating to the late seventh and the eighth century have been found in burial assemblages excavated in the northern Caucasus, a clear indication of the importance of the Silk Road at that period, which is otherwise not mentioned in the sources.⁹⁶

A very important area of activity for the Byzantine merchants of Crimea, but also for the silk trade, was that around the mouth of the Don, an area that became of great importance after the fall of Bosphorus to the Turks in 576.⁹⁷ Worth mentioning in that respect is also the activity of the Jews in the Khazar khaganate, who traded along the routes north of the Carpathian Mountains that reached Prague, Regensburg, and Mainz.⁹⁸ The westernmost end of the Silk Road may explain the – possible – presence of Chinese silk or motifs in *Avaria*,⁹⁹ as well as the broader dissemination of decorative motifs during the Late Avar period. For example, cast belt fittings in the Middle Danube have good analogies in Ciscaucasia, namely in an area next to the trade routes connecting the East with the West. The commercial activity along those routes may also be responsible for the transfer of certain patterns of the Iranian art to the Avars.¹⁰⁰ A possibility too for Central Asian textiles in the Khaganate during the eighth century is assumed by a few wild boar heads depicted on some ceramic cups, namely decorative patterns similar to oriental silks.¹⁰¹

The communication between the Black Sea and Central Europe in the eighth century thus allowed Byzantine merchants to move their goods to the Carpathian Basin and even to Western Europe, as long as relations between Byzantium and the Khazars were favorable. Despite claims to the contrary, the Byzantine possessions in the Crimea, and especially Cherson, remained strong urban centers in the eighth century, as demonstrated, among others, by the influence of the bishopric of Gothia.¹⁰² According to the first episcopal list (*Notitia*), dated between 733 and 746, several bishoprics were established outside the Byzantine Empire, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the province of Gothia. The metropolitan see of Gothia was in Doros, and its suffragans were the bishops of Chotziron, Astil, Choualis, Onogouron, Reteg, Huns

96 Haussig 1988, 43; idem 1992, 154–155; Noonan 1992, 122; Dimitroukas 1997 I, 166–167.

97 Haussig 1988, 43; idem 1992, 155.

98 Haussig 1988, 47–48; Asadov 2012, 145–147; idem 2016, 42–44.

99 See ch. 4.4, n. 100; ch. 5.3.2, n. 74; see also Daim 2000, 134 who considers as Chinese the dragon-motif on a strap-end from Abony.

100 Kollautz 1970, 37; Erdélyi 1988, 355–356; Gavrituhin 2006, 17; Szenthe 2016, 359–360.

101 Bollók 2015b, 63, n. 29.

102 See Romančuk 2005, 35–38, 61–63.

and Tamatarcha.¹⁰³ The influence of Byzantium inside the Khazar khaganate in the mid-eighth century is evident from the establishment of the bishopric of Astil, which most likely is the same as Itil/Atil, the name of the Khazar capital.¹⁰⁴ The building of churches in the eighth century has in fact been explained as the result of the Christianization of at least a part of Khazar elite.¹⁰⁵

Byzantine trade flourished in the Crimea since the fourth century.¹⁰⁶ Apart from coin finds,¹⁰⁷ the trade activity and the vibrant urban life of the Byzantine possessions in the Crimea in the mid-eighth century are documented through the seals. Although no seals of *kommerkiarioi* based in Cherson or Sougdaia (modern Sudak) in that early period have been found yet,¹⁰⁸ the numerous seals of *kommerkiarioi* from other regions of the Empire, and especially from the Pontos area, discovered in those ports indicate local customs offices and show the intense trade activity, which may also be related to the Khazars. Regarding Sougdaia, we note, among others, the seals of Kyriakos, *apo hypaton and genikos logothetes of the apotheke of Constantinople* (late seventh c.), Ioannes, *hypatos and genikos kommerkiarios of Honorias, Paphlagonia and the coasts of Pontos* (first half of the eighth c.), the *imperial kommerkia of the eparchiai of the Opsikion guarded by God* (first half of the eighth c.) and that of the *imperial kommerkia of... [the area] up to Polemonion* (first half of the eighth c.).¹⁰⁹ Seventh- and eighth-century seals are also known from Cherson, e.g. those of *kommerkiarioi* or the *archontes* of the city. Moreover, of great importance is the seal of an *archon of the vlatton* (imperial silk workshops), dated in 739–751.¹¹⁰ The seal of a *kommerkiarios* named Theodore from Cherson (late sixth–early seventh c.) is the earliest of a *kommerkiarios* found in the Crimea.¹¹¹ Byzantine coins of the eighth century discovered in areas

103 *Notitiae Episcopatum* (Not. 3), 611–618, 241–242: ΑΗ' ἐπαρχία Γοτθίας. α' Δόρος μητρόπολις. β' ὁ Χοτζίρων. γ' ὁ Ἀστίλ. δ' ὁ Χουάλης. ε' ὁ Ὀνογούρων. ζ' ὁ Πετέγ. ζ' ὁ Οὔννων. η' ὁ Ταμάταρχα; Golden 1992 102; idem 2011b, 142; Kralides 2003, 198; Zuckerman 2006, 214–215; Aibabin 2011, 193–195; Albrecht 2016, 366; Bollók 2017, 424–425.

104 Kralides 2003, 199–200; Zuckerman 2006, 214.

105 Alexandrowna-Pletnewa 1978, 42.

106 See Aibabin 2013, 57–67; Ivanov 2013, 82–84; Sedikova 2013, 132–133; Choref 2015, 24–49; Albrecht 2016, 355–362.

107 Choref 2015, 50–61.

108 See Alekseenko 2012, 51–59, for seals of *kommerkiarioi* of Cherson dated from the mid-9th c. onward.

109 Šandrovskaja 1993, 85–90; eadem 1995, 153–155; Stepanova 2003, 126; eadem 2009, 176, 178–181; Zuckermann 2007, 431–432; Aibabin 2011, 191–192; idem 2013, 61–62.

110 Sokolova 1993, 106; Sophoulis 2012, 136; Aibabin 2013, 61.

111 Alekseenko 2016, 8–9.

within the Khazar khaganate might be also an indication for trade relations with Byzantium.¹¹²

Although the chronological resolution for the existing evidence is not great, the peaceful relations between Byzantium and the Khazars, which contributed to the development of this trade activity, lasted for approximately 40 years, from 720 until 760. During that period, Byzantine merchants from Crimea were plausibly traveled along the road network north of the Black Sea, which linked the Eurasian steppe lands with Central Europe.

Byzantine coins from the Carpathian Basin, which could be dated after 626, may also shed light on the channels of communication question. The great number of coins struck for Constans II could have been obtained from Byzantine Italy, during the period of good relations between Byzantium and the Lombards (643–663). By contrast, the coins minted for Constantine IV may be linked, at least in part, to the Avar embassy to Constantinople in 678, while those of Theodosius III, Leo III and Constantine V are likely to be related to the trade activity that flourished after the Byzantine-Bulgar treaty of 716, or as a result of the good relations between the Byzantines and the Khazars. In other words, under Emperors Constans II and Constantine IV, communication between Byzantium and the Avars was most likely through the northern Adriatic. Conversely, the later coins may have come either through Bulgaria or through Crimea. The reign of Tiberius II (698–705) witnessed an improvement of the Byzantine-Lombard relations during the reign of Perctarit and Cunipert (671–712). Coins struck for Tiberius II may have therefore reached *Avaria* from the west. By contrast, those minted for Anastasius II (713–715) may have traveled across the Balkans.

Summarizing the restoration of the Byzantine-Avar relations after 626 we note that, despite the limited evidence offered by the written sources, Byzantine artifacts or motifs observed in the Avar art, as well as coin finds indicate that contacts between Byzantium and the Avars continued well almost until the end of the Khaganate, with channels of communication through the northern Adriatic, the Balkan territories under Bulgar control, or the Crimea. In other words, contacts between Byzantium and the Avars may be documented with no interruption until c. 775. The archaeological evidence, therefore, testify the great extent of the cultural and commercial contacts and forces one to abandon older assumptions, e.g. that “for two centuries, between 650 and 850, Central Europe lay outside the orbit of Byzantium.”¹¹³

112 Alexandrowna-Pletnewa 1978, 41, 69; Somogyi 2008b, 130–137; Abramzon and Ostapenko 2016, 266–279.

113 Obolensky 1971, 136.

Byzantine-Avar Relations and Warfare

6.1 The Armament of Avar and Byzantine Horsemen

A very important aspect of the Byzantine-Avar relations is the question of the mutual influences in matters of warfare, particularly armament, the use of heavily armored horseman, tactics, and siege engines. Avar warfare is described in considerable detail in the Byzantine sources, particularly the *Strategikon* (likely of the emperor Maurice), Theophylact Simocatta, and the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius*. Valuable informations on armament may be derived from archaeological finds, particularly from the deposition of weapons in graves.

The most important work for the comparative examination of both the Byzantine and the Avar warfare is the *Strategikon*, which deals with armament, tactics, and the structure of the Byzantine military units.¹ The reforms that took place in the Byzantine army, as reflected in the late sixth or early seventh century in the *Strategikon* are those that came to define that army for the following centuries. Indeed, there are no indications of radical changes in the early tenth-century military treatise known as the *Taktika*, and attributed to Leo VI.² As Edward N. Luttwak points out, “the *Strategikon*, the most complete Byzantine field manual in spite of its brevity, depicts an army radically different in structure from the classic Roman model, most obviously because of a fundamental shift from infantry to cavalry as the primary combat arm ... it was caused by a veritable strategic revolution in the very purpose of waging war, which compelled the adoption of new operational methods and new tactics.”³ A notable trait of this work is that, although written in Greek, it records many military commands in Latin form.⁴ The *Strategikon* was written during the peak of the conflict between the Avars and the Byzantines, which explains why its author devotes a great deal of attention to the Avars among

1 Most scholars believe that the *Strategikon* was written during Maurice's reign either by the emperor himself or by a high-ranking military commander. See Zástěrová 1971, 5; Bachrach 1984, 14, 18–19; Kolias 1988, 31; idem 1993, 39; Dagron 1993, 279; Shlosser 1994, 33–34; Nicolle 1996, 32; Kaegi 2003, 308; Luttwak 2009, 236, 267; Fyfe 2017, 112–113. On the older view that the *Strategikon* must be dated to the reign of Heraclius, see Darkó 1937, 122–125; Bréhier 1949, 342.

2 See Leo VI, *Tactics*, 671–1120; Darkó 1937, 138–139; Graff 2016, 110.

3 Luttwak 2009, 267–269.

4 Ibidem, 267–268.

the “Hunnish peoples”, the subject of the second chapter in the eleventh book of the treatise.⁵

The military power of the Avars, like all nomadic peoples,⁶ relied on the cavalry, with horsemen wearing heavy armor.⁷ According to the *Strategikon*, the Avars “are armed with coats of mail (*zaves*), swords, bows and lances. In the battle most of them bear two weapons, having the lances over their shoulders and the bows in their hands, and use both of them as need requires. And bear armour not only they, but also the horses of the officials are covered in front with iron or thick felt (*kentoukla*). They give special attention to training in mounted archery.”⁸ This information is substantiated by archaeological finds from Avar cemeteries, even though graves with complete military equipment are rare. A great variety of weapons, as well as armor may be found in Avar graves, connected also with the social position of the horsemen: fragments of helmets as well as of lamellar and mail armor, splinted armor for the arms and the legs, swords, lances, bows, sabers, knives, and axes.⁹ There are also a few images of warriors on horseback. The best known among them is the so-called “victorious ruler” depicted on the vase n. 2 found in the Nagyszentmiklós hoard. This is a heavily armored horseman riding without either saddle or stirrups. His head is protected by a conical helmet attached to the aventail, the warrior carries a lance on his right shoulder. His body is covered by mail armor, with splints for the arms and the legs.¹⁰ Beginning with the Middle Avar period a new weapon made its appearance in warrior graves. This was initially a single-edge sword, later replaced with a saber with or without guard and with several types of scabbard suspension mounts.¹¹

5 Ibidem, 291.

6 The concept of well organized nomadic armies, as opposed to “hordes”, is promoted by Ch. Szabó (2009, 62–70).

7 Bachrach 1984, 21 (light cavalry); Bóna 2000, 166; Szentpéteri 1993, 248–249; Hofer 1996, 353; Daim 1998, 83 (up to the eighth century); Luttwak 2009, 395; Graff 2016, 145.

8 *Strategikon*, XI. b', 362 (Dennis 1984, 362); Zástěrová 1971, 38; Bachrach 1984, 18; Pohl 1988a, 170–171; Bracher 1990, 143; Szentpéteri 1993, 166; Nicolle 1996, 36; Stark 2008, 169; Luttwak 2009, 291; Golden 2011a, 110; Curta 2016, 73–74; Graff 2016, 140.

9 Bachrach 1984, 14, 19; Garam 1987, 194–195; eadem 1990, 253–254; Pohl 1988a, 89, 173–174; Bálint 1989, 160; Szentpéteri 1993, 165–246; idem 1994, 231–306; Nagy 2005, 135–148; Kubarev 2006, 455–456, 463–464; Stark 2008, 153, 165; Gavrituchin 2008, 73–74; Bárdos and Garam 2009, no. 221; Curta 2013, 820–821; idem 2016, 74. For a detailed approach to Avar weaponry, see also Pintér-Nagy 2017, 85ff; Csiky 2015 as well as the volume *Warriors*. On the armament of the Juan-Juan in Central Asia, see Chudjakov, 2006, 57–58, 61–65.

10 Russell-Robinson 1967, 56–57; Pohl 1988a, 171.

11 Garam 1987, 196; Bálint 1989, 160; Fülöp 1990, 145; Daim 2003, 488; Gavrituchin 2008, 74, 80; Stark 2008, 156; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 89–92; Graff 2016, 140.

In the Avar cemetery of Mödling (Austria), a disc-shaped button was found in grave 144. On the button, two archers are depicted who wear lamellar armor. Another warrior with lamellar armor appears in a hunting scene depicted on a large strap-end found in Klárafalva (Hungary).¹² The closest parallel to those images is a rock-relief from Sulek (Siberia) showing a horseman with lamellar cuirass with short sleeve, as well as a conical helmet with side-whiskers, but without aventail.¹³ In the *Utrecht Psalter* (about 820), pagan horsemen are depicted with stirrups, small reflex bows, and scale armor and they are regarded as “true” depictions of Avars.¹⁴ The same is assumed for the *Stuttgart Psalter*, which is also dated to the ninth century, and shows the Israelites and the Syrians in the battle of the Valley of Salt as Franks and Avars, respectively.¹⁵

Regarding the Avar weaponry, most of the scholars believe that the Avars used no shields, taking into account the finds from the horsemen burials graves. In his minute study, József Szentpéteri associates the fragments of shields found in the Khaganate with the Gepidic infantry in the Avar service and in such a way he interprets the testimony of Menander the Quardsman for the protection of the Avar khagan with shields during the siege of Sirmium, in c. 582. Nonetheless, the Hungarian scholar, based on certain depictions, considers that the shield was in use in the Late Avar period.¹⁶ Furthermore, Katalin Pintér-Nagy believes that the Avars used slings.¹⁷ To be sure, the word for sling (σφενδόνη) appears in the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* in the context of the Avar siege of Thessalonica and the description of siege engines (see below). Regarding the cited by the Hungarian scholar sources, Theodore Synkellos refers to stone-throwing devices (βολαὶ χερμάδων)¹⁸ and Plotinos of Thessalonica repeats the testimony of the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*.¹⁹ Synkellos’ choice of the word χερμάς is important, because the word is related to χεῖρ (hand).

12 Pohl 1988a, 171; Daim 1996b, 261, 300 (fig. 5.283); idem 2003, 499; Szenthe 2013b, 159.

13 Russell-Robinson 1967, 57–58; Haldon 1975, 25.

14 Mesterházy 1968, 245–248; Pohl 1988a, 313; Bracher 1990, 145, n. 73; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 86, 102.

15 Bachrach 1984, 5–24; Bracher 1990, 145–146; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 86, 101, n. 85.

16 See Menander, *History*, 27. 2, 238 (Blockley): Before his chest and his face they held up shields like a defensive wall to prevent the Romans suddenly shooting arrows at him; Szentpéteri 1993, 194, 206–209, 216 (209, n. 51): “Die vollständige Panzerung der späten Awaren können wir auf den Reiter mit Lanze und Schild darstellenden Gürtelbeschlägen von Balatonszőlős erkennen”; Hofer 1996, 352; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 102–103.

17 Pintér-Nagy 2017, 97–98. For the slings in the Byzantine army, see Kolias 1988, 254–259.

18 Synkellos, *Homily*, 19, 306.

19 Plotinos, *Enkomion*, 10, 49: ... κοντοῖς τε καὶ βέλεσι καὶ σφενδόναις πρὸ τῶν κλιμάκων ἀμύνεσθαι παρεσκεύαστο,....

However, this may well be a poetic license, in other words a synonym for *σφενδόνη* in the *Miracles*.

As the *Strategikon* shows, the armament of the Avar horseman may be directly comparable with the armament of the Byzantine mounted lancer-archer. The Byzantine horseman used a long, hooded coat of mail (*zava/lorikion*) reaching to his ankles, and an iron helmet with a small plume on the top. His neck was covered by a round aventail made of textile fabric, with fringes on the outside and wool inside. The elite horsemen, the *bucellarii*, also used iron gauntlets and small pennons on the shoulders, over their coats of mail. In some cases the shield completed the defensive armor. Each Byzantine horseman carried both a sword and a lance. His bow was in a case hanging from the saddle or was attached to his waist by means of a strap. The accompanying quiver contained between thirty or forty arrows. His equipment included two spare bowstrings, various small tools, two stirrups, saddlebags, and a tent. The recommendation of the *Strategikon* was for the clothes of the horseman to be broad, in order to give him a neat appearance. On top of those clothes, he was to wear a long coat made of thick textile that was impenetrable to both rain and arrows.²⁰ It is important to note that the *Strategikon* has no comparable recommendations for the armament of the light cavalry, which according to John Haldon, relied on foreign mercenaries and smaller units of Byzantine horsemen, as in the era of Justinian.²¹

The phrase “manner of the Avars” (see below) is used five times in the *Strategikon*, but it is not clear if that refers to a novel model, some peculiarities of the Avar armament, or simply to the omnipresence of the Avars in the late sixth- and early seventh-century military engagements of the Byzantine army. It is therefore important to pinpoint exactly the Avar influences and to separate them from innovations that may have been introduced into the Byzantine army before 558, under the influence of other peoples on horseback, particularly steppe nomads and the Sassanians.

20 *Strategikon*, I. b, 78–82; Zástěrová 1971, 39–40; Haldon 1975, 21–22; Kolias 1988, 79, 200–201, 227–229; Luttwak 2009, 271, 274–275, 278, 290; Fyfe 2017, 123; Curta 2016, 87. For the –rather of Persian origin– *zava* (mail coat) and its identification with *lorikion*, see *Suda lexicon* II, Z 1, 499: Ζάβαρειον· ἐν ᾧ αἱ ζάβαι, αἱ εἰσιν ὅπλα πολεμικά, ἀπόκεινται. Ζάβα γὰρ τὸ λωρίκιον; Bivar 1972, 288; Haldon 1975, 24, 34; Kolias 1980, 27–35; idem 1988, 37–44; idem 1993, 41; Nicolle 1996, 38.

21 Haldon 1975, 23.

6.2 The Nomads as Mercenaries in the Byzantine Army

The Byzantines familiarized themselves with the warfare of the steppe nomads mostly after suffering serious defeats at the hands of the Huns during the reign of Attila. However, by that time the Huns had already been hired as mercenaries in the Roman army, especially as mounted archers. Later, their skills played a key role in the success of the expeditions that Emperor Justinian sent against the Vandals and the Ostrogoths.²² Before encountering the Avars, the Byzantines had also come into contact with Bulgar tribes (the Onogurs and the Kutrigurs), who used similar methods of waging war.²³ The Byzantines first trusted the military assistance of the Bulgars in 481/82 against the Ostrogoths under Emperor Zenon (474–491).²⁴ By the end of the sixth century, the Byzantines must have become acquainted with the Bulgar weapons and equipment for the *Strategikon* to include a reference to Bulgar coats (*sagia*) as not appropriate for the equipment of the heavily armored infantry.²⁵

With contact with Huns and Bulgars and their recruitment as mercenaries in the Byzantine army, the importance of mounted archery increased, which gradually led to the appearance of the so-called “composite cavalryman,” who was both lancer and archer. Moreover, the adoption of the “Hunnish” (composite, or reflex) bow improved the efficacy of the Byzantine cavalry, and greatly contributed to the military victories of Maurice and Heraclius against the Persians.²⁶

Archery was one of the most important techniques taught to soldiers of the Byzantine army in the sixth and seventh century. According to the *Strategikon*, soldiers no older than forty years of age were supposed to know how to use the bow in battle, and how to switch from bow to lance. Even unskilled

22 Dagron 1993, 282; Kuosmanen 2013, 40, 76, 85–144, 215, 218; Sarantis 2013c, 187; Graff 2016, 159; Fyfe 2017, 142.

23 Beševliev 1980, 21–26; Bóna 1981, 85–86, 103; Pohl 1988a, 55, 228; Kolias 1988, 28; Diethart and Kislinger 2000, 11; Luttwak 2009, 236.

24 John of Antioch, *History*, 95, 135; Bóna 1981, 82; Golden 2011a, 70, idem 2011b, 143; idem 2015, 352; Sophoulis 2012, 95.

25 *Strategikon*, XII. B, a, 420, 8 (Dennis 1984, 138): Their mantles should be simple, not like the Bulgarian cloaks; Diethart and Kislinger 2000, 10.

26 Haldon 1975, 12; Kolias 1988, 214–215, 234; Dagron 1993, 281; Karantabias 2005–2006, 29, 31; Luttwak 2009, 56; Graff 2016, 158–159. On the composite bow, see Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 166, 175; Ricz 1983, 2–10; Bachrach 1984, 12, 14; Bracher 1990, 137; Hofer 1996, 351; Daim 2003, 465, 478; Chudjakov, 2006, 43–52; Luttwak 2009, 275; Sarantis 2013c, 167; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 28–29.

men had light bows.²⁷ In the mid-sixth century, Procopius of Caesarea noted the differences between the light Persian and the “Roman” bow of nomadic inspiration.²⁸ It is therefore clear that the adoption of that bow pre-dates the contact between the Avars and the Byzantines, and must be attributed to Hunnic influence.²⁹ The *Strategikon*, however, insisted upon the bow training of soldiers, both on foot and on horseback. They were supposed to be familiar with both the Byzantine (thumb and forefinger) and the Persian (three middle fingers) technique, practicing even the so-called “Parthian shot.”³⁰ As Edward N. Luttwak points out, “the primary type of soldier in the *Strategikon* was neither an infantryman nor a cavalryman, but rather both, and a bowman first of all. He therefore required training in both foot and mounted archery ... Mounted and dismounted archery had its specific roles in every stage of battle, from initial sniping at long range to the rapid volleys of all-out engagements, to the pursuit of retreating enemies with forward bowshots, or defensively, to provide rearguard covering shots against advancing enemies.”³¹

Some fifty years before the *Strategikon*, the Hunnic and Bulgar influences upon the Byzantine cavalry may be observed in Procopius’ account. According to him, the Byzantine heavily armored horseman wore cuirass and greaves, and carried bow, quiver, sword and lance. He had a small, circular shield without a handle attached to his left shoulder, to cover his face and his neck.³² The use of this small shield without a handle, which is mentioned both by Procopius and the *Strategikon*, was apparently necessary as long as wielding the lance required both hands, in a manner of fighting spread from the nomads to Byzantium and Persia.³³

The *Strategikon* recommends that lancers use the shield,³⁴ while the small shields in relation to mounted archers may be a reminiscence of the cavalry

27 *Strategikon*, I. b, 78; Zástěrová 1971, 38; Haldon 1975, 22; Bachrach 1984, 13; Kolias 1988, 231–233; Dagron 1993, 281; Nicolle 1996, 31; Karantabias 2005–2006, 31; Luttwak 2009, 279; Fyfe 2017, 123, 143.

28 Procopius, *Wars*, I, 18. 32–34, 96; Christensen 1944, 368; Nicolle 1996, 36.

29 Luttwak 2009, 57.

30 *Strategikon*, I. a, 74–76; ibidem, XI1, B. 3, 420; Karantabias 2005–2006, 31; Luttwak 2009, 270–273; Fyfe 2017, 123–124, 143.

31 Luttwak 2009, 269–271.

32 Procopius, *Wars*, I, 1. 12–13, 6–7; Haldon 1975, 18; Bachrach 1984, 20, n. 36; Bracher 1990, 143; Dagron 1993, 281; Luttwak 2009, 57; Fyfe 2017, 123.

33 Coulston 1986, 67. On the basis of Khusro II’s relief at Taq-i-Bustan, Kolias (1988, 112, 122), distinguishes the Persian manner of using the small shield by the Byzantines.

34 *Strategikon*, I. b, 78 (Dennis 1984, 12): The unskilled with the bow young ‘barbarians’ should have lances and shields; Kolias 1988, 112; Bracher 1990, 143.

armament from the times of Emperor Justinian.³⁵ Procopius describes the mounted archer as a formidable warrior who could shoot while riding “so powerfully, that no shield or cuirass could stop such an arrow with so great speed.”³⁶ The influences of the steppe peoples upon the Byzantine military during the first half of the sixth century appear also in the *Treatise on Strategy*, who devoted four chapters to the use of the bow, the techniques of archery, and the training for mounted combat.³⁷

6.3 Sassanian Influences on the Byzantine Army

In addition to the aforementioned nomads, the Sassanians, as well as earlier Iranian nomads (Alans, Sarmatians and Parthians), had a long and important influence upon the Roman military. Since the mid-third century, the Romans began to create units of mounted archers in imitation of the heavy armoured cavalry of the Sassanians. The key role of both *clibanarii* and *catafractarii* (see below) in the early Byzantine army is highlighted in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (dated to the early fifth century). However, there is no mention in the *Strategikon* of such types of heavy armored cavalry.³⁸

Prior to the Sassanian take-over, the Parthians first introduced a new model of the fighting in close order based on the heavily armored cataphract (*clibanarius*), who combined the idea of a Hellenistic cataphract, the Persian horseman of the Achaemenid era and the Parthian-era armament. The typical armament of a cataphract included cuirass (mail, scale or lamellar), small shield, aventail, gauntlets, greaves, conical or semicircular helmet with mask, breastplates, splint armor for arms and legs, tunic, heavy sleeveless mantle made of leather or felt, and broad leather trousers. The cataphract carried a lance, a sword, bow, knife and an axe or a mace.³⁹

35 *Strategikon*, III. a, 146 (Dennis 1984, 35): Fourth in file, rear guard with bow and shield; Bracher 1990, 143; Luttwak 2009, 301.

36 Procopius, *Wars*, I, 1.1, 7; Bivar 1972, 286; Haldon 1975, 19; Kolias 1988, 234; Luttwak 2009, 270; Curta 2016, 69; Fyfe 2017, 140.

37 *Treatise on Strategy*, 44–47, 128–134; Kolias 1988, 229–237. According to A.D.H. Bivar (1972, 284), the technique to draw the cord with the thumb (the so-called “Mongolian draw”), as it described to *Treatise on Strategy*, became known to the Byzantines by the Huns; see also Graff 2016, 158 (from the Parthians to the Romans); Fyfe 2017, 123. On the dating of the treatise in the mid-ninth c., see Cosentino 2000, 243–280.

38 See Luttwak 2009, 276–278; Graff 2016, 56, 157–159.

39 Russell-Robinson 1967, 19–22; Gamber 1968, 7–14, 23–26, 31; Bivar 1972, 276; Diethart and Dintsis 1984, 72, 77–78; Kolias 1988, 182–184; Mielczarek 1998, 101–104; Skupniewicz 2014, 35–36; For the depiction of a – rather – Parthian *cataphractus/clibanarius* to a graffito

The ancient terminology includes such terms as *cataphracti/catafracti*, *catafractarii* and *clibanarii*.⁴⁰ However, the difference between those terms is not so clear. Some scholars believe them to be identical, while others distinguish between armored *clibanarii* carrying bow and lance from masked *cataphracti* with lance and shield.⁴¹ In his detailed study of this matter, Valerii P. Nikonorov assumes that the *cataphracti* were fully covered in armor and fought with long heavy lances, and that their horses were also entirely protected by trappers, either metal-clad or made of thick leather. The similarly equipped *clibanarii* (a term that supplanted the former in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine period) occasionally used shields or bows. According to Nikonorov, the main difference between *cataphracti* and *clibanarii* was that the former wore helmet, mail or scale corselet, shield and lance, but their horses had no armour. The heavier *cataphracti* and *clibanarii* "were more efficient to be a ram, especially against armoured formations and defence in depth."⁴² By contrast, Luttwak believes that the *clibanarii* were plate-armored and the *cataphracts* had sewn-on scale armor or chain mail coats. At any rate, the *cataphracti* later turned into the lancer-archer units or horsemen covered with scale- or chain-mail armor that are described in the *Strategikon*.⁴³

The name *clibanarius* derives from the Greek word *clivanion*, which applied to a waist-length, lamellar or scale cuirass with short sleeves, which commonly came on top of the mail coat.⁴⁴ The use of scale, lamellar, or mail armor to protect the *cataphractus* or the *clibanarius* caused a radical change in the equipment of both cavalry and infantry, as it replaced the segmented or leather cuirasses used in Antiquity.⁴⁵ Beginning with the fourth century, the coat of mail became the standard type of armor for both Romans and Sassanians, for

in Dura-Europos (middle of third c. AD), as well as of equivalent armour to the arch of Galerius in Thessalonica, see Russell-Robinson, op. cit. 20 (fig. 8); Gamber op. cit., 18–19, 30 (fig. 43); Haldon 1975, 25; Speidel 1984, 155; Coulston 1986, 62; Nikonorov 1998, 135.

40 SHA II, 56. 5, 290–292: centum et viginti milia equitum eorum fudimus, cataphractarios, quos illi clibanarios vocant ...; Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 16, 10. 8, 176: ... sparsique cataphracti equites, quos clibanarios dictitant ...; for the relevant references to the sources, see Nikonorov 1998, 131–133.

41 See Gamber 1968, 31; Speidel 1984, 153–154; Diethart and Dintsis 1984, 68–70, 77; Coulston 1986, 63; Kolias 1988, 109, 205; Gall 1990, 74–75; Luttwak 2009, 277 (the *clibanarii* heavily armored); see also, Nikonorov 1998, 134–135.

42 Nikonorov 1998, 135–138.

43 Luttwak 2009, 276–278.

44 Haldon 1975, 27; Kolias 1988, 44–49; Nikonorov 1998, 132–133, 136, according to whom the *clibanarius* was the definite type of the Late Roman heavy cavalry.

45 Gamber 1968, 8–11. On the three types of cuirass, see Russell-Robinson 1967, 2–12; Bivar 1972, 276–278; Haldon 1975, 13–15, 18; Coulston 1986, 63, 70; Gall 1990, 61–67; Nicolle 1996, 37–38; Sarantis 2013c, 161.

it was more flexible and it could be combined with other types, especially with the lamellar armor. The coat of mail could be added to the helmet to cover the face and the neck of the horseman.⁴⁶ When the Sassanians replaced the Parthians in Iran, they also adopted the Parthian model of armored cavalry. According to Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, the heavily armored Persian horseman wore helmet with mask, knee-length scale armour, and greaves, and carried a lance and a curved sword.⁴⁷ During the third and the fourth centuries, that equipment and those weapons became the standard for *cataphracti* and *clibanarii* in the Roman and the Byzantine cavalry, which was very similar to the Persian one.⁴⁸

The equipment and weapons of the Persian horseman during the sixth century is a particular interest for the Byzantine cavalry under Justinian and Maurice. According to the *Strategikon*, the Persians "use mail armor (*zava*), bows and swords and they are more practiced in rapid archery, although not so powerful, than all other warlike nations."⁴⁹ A later Arabic source, al-Tabari, describes the Persian horseman at the time of Khusro I (531–579) as wearing mail armor reinforced with breastplates, helmet, metal plates at the arms and legs, and carrying a lance, a circular shield, a sword, a mace strapped to the belt, an axe, a quiver for thirty arrows, and a bow case containing two bows and two spare bow strings. His horse was also covered with mail armor.⁵⁰

In addition to the written sources, much information may be gleaned from the depictions of Sassanian kings or warriors. In the carved relief at Taq-i-Bustan, Khusro II (591–628; although some believe the king to be Peroz, 459–484,⁵¹ or Yazdegerd, 633–651⁵²) wears a knee-length mail coat, helmet with small plume, mail aventail and a mask adapted to the helmet, leaving

46 Russell-Robinson 1967, 23–24; Gamber 1968, 26, 29 (fig. 41–42); Bivar 1972, 275; Diethart and Dintsis 1984, 73; Kolias 1988, 40–41.

47 Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, III, 9, 15, 57; Gamber 1968, 27–28; Diethart and Dintsis 1984, 73–74; Kolias 1988, 203–204; Dignas and Winter 2007, 63.

48 Gamber 1968, 15–23, 28–29; Bivar 1972, 279; Diethart and Dintsis 1984, 70–71, 74–78; Speidel 1984, 151; Kolias 1988, 40, 69; Gall 1990, 77–78; Nikonorov 1998, 132; Luttwak 2009, 56, 276; Skupniewicz 2014, 36. For an overview of the eastern influences on Roman warfare, see James 2006, 357–392.

49 *Strategikon*, XI, a, 354 (Dennis 1984, 114); Dignas and Winter 2007, 64; Luttwak 2009, 289–290.

50 Al-Tabari, *History*, ch. 964, 262–263; Christensen 1944, 368; Bivar 1972, 276; Kolias 1988, 122, n. 179; Skupniewicz 2014, 37; Graff 2016, 159–160.

51 See Gamber 1968, 30; Gall 1990, 38, 44–46, 78.

52 Mode 2006, 400–401.

only the eyes uncovered. He also carries a small shield, a lance, and a quiver.⁵³ Depictions on later Sassanian silverware show a combination of mail with lamellar armor, as well as mail or lamellar aventails.⁵⁴ The additional breastplates mentioned by al-Tabari may well be the *peristithidia* that appear in the *Treatise on Strategy*.⁵⁵ Those came under the cuirass to provide a greater protection against enemy blows.

As mentioned, the horse of the *cataphractus* or *clibanarius* was also protected by armor. The Parthians used metal, leather, or felt armor for their horses, to cover the entire body.⁵⁶ During the early Sassanian period, the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus and the depictions of kings show the same horse armor as that in existence under the Parthian Empire.⁵⁷ By contrast, on later depictions, such as the relief of Khusro II at Taq-i-Bustan, the horse is not completely covered in armor, only to the head, the breast and the neck.⁵⁸ A similar armor for the horse is described in the *Strategikon*⁵⁹ and in the *Treatise on Strategy*.⁶⁰ It should be noted that a lighter variant of armored horseman appears in Sassanian Persia as early as the fifth century, no doubt as a consequence of contact (and conflict) with the steppe peoples.⁶¹

The sixth-century, heavily armored Persian horseman is very similar to that described in the *Strategikon*, who also used mail coat (*zava/lorikion*), a helmet with small plume, an aventail, a small round shield, a sword, a lance, a bow, a bow case, a quiver with 30–40 arrows, and a long mantle. The horse of the early

53 Russell-Robinson 1967, 24–25; Haldon 1975, 24; Vanden Berghe 1984, 147; Diethart and Dintsis 1984, 73–74; Coulston 1986, 64 (fig. 6. 1); Ferrier 1987, 76–78; Dignas and Winter 2007, 66–67.

54 Russell-Robinson 1967, 23–24, 57; Haldon 1975, 24–25; Dignas and Winter 2007, 66.

55 *Treatise on Strategy*, 16, 54–56: The rest of the troops may be provided with coats of mail, breastplates, and head coverings fashioned of felt or leather. So that the rough material does not chafe the skin, they should wear padded garments (*peristithidia*) under them, as we recommended for iron breastplates and other items; Kolias 1988, 50–51.

56 *Suda lexicon* II, Θ 439, 724; Gamber 1968, 25; Coulston 1986, 62; Gall 1990, 74; Sarantis 2013c, 172; for the horse scale armor found in Dura-Europos, see Russell-Robinson 1967, 20 (fig. 8); Bivar 1972, 275; Haldon 1975, 20; Diethart and Dintsis 1984, 79; Skupniewicz 2014, 42.

57 Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, III, 9. 15, 57–58; Russell-Robinson 1967, 21 (fig. 9/A and B); Gall 1990, 78; Dignas and Winter 2007, 63–64; Skupniewicz 2014, 38, 50; On the assumption that horses in Persia had helmets, see Littauer and Crouwel 2002, 534–544.

58 Russell-Robinson 1967, 24–25; Skupniewicz 2014, 49.

59 See below, n. 63; On the *kentoukla* (felt armor), mentioned in the *Strategikon*, see also *Suda Lexicon* IV, Π 1597, 131; Kolias 1984, 54–61; Skupniewicz 2014, 39, 49.

60 *Treatise on Strategy*, 17, 56: The horses of the soldiers in the front line should not be too young or unused to noise and confusion. They should be equipped with iron armour for their heads, breasts, and necks.

61 See Gamber 1968, 30; Mode 2006, 401–402; Skupniewicz 2014, 51–52; Graff 2016, 159–160.

Byzantine cavalryman had also metal or felt armor for the breast and the neck, as well as a metal shaffron. In fact, a close examination of the equipment and weapons of the early Byzantine, heavily armored cavalryman indicates that the model that the author of the *Strategikon* had in mind was not Avar, but Persian. After all, the early Byzantine military has numerous occasions during the fifth and sixth century to encounter the Sassanian *clibanarius*, long before any contacts were established between the Empire and the Avars. Unlike the horsemen described in the *Strategikon* and by al-Tabari or depicted in the relief at Taq-i-Bustan, the third- and fourth-century *cataphracts* or *clibanarii* were more rigid in their movements, for they used mainly scale armor, they often combined two different cuirasses, had a mask instead of a mail cover for the face, and had full protection for the horse body. Conversely, when one compares the horsemen described by Procopius or the author of the *Treatise on Strategy* with those in the *Strategikon*, it appears that the latter had a more complete equipment, in that they had hoods added to the mail coat, aventail and gauntlets. On the other hand, they had no greaves.

6.4 The “Manner of the Avars” in the *Strategikon*

At the center of the question of Avar influences upon the Byzantine army is the heavy cavalry, the equipment of which is described in sufficient detail to be comparable with the archaeological finds. The many recommendations that the author of the *Strategikon* gave to Byzantine commanders to imitate the Avar cavalry, as well as the many references to the “manner of the Avars” has prompted many scholars to conclude that the Byzantine cavalry forces were modeled after the units of heavily armored Avar horsemen.⁶² Such a conclusion is based on five specific points raised in the *Strategikon*: the use of a lance with leather thong in the middle of the shaft and with pennon under the head; the use of a circular aventail, with linen fringes on the outside and wool inside; the use of armor for heads, breasts and necks of horses, especially those of officers and special troops; the use of broad clothes made of linen, goat’s hair, or rough wool, to cover the knees of the horseman; the use of Avar tents on campaigns.⁶³

62 Darkó 1937, 128–129; Bréhier 1949, 279; Haldon 1975, 22–23; Bracher 1990, 141; Dagron 1993, 280–281; Karantabias 2005–2006, 30, 39; Kubarev 2006, 460, 464; Luttwak 2009, 291; Graff 2016, 139.

63 *Strategikon*, I. b, 78–82; Zástěrová 1971, 38–40; Haldon 1975, 21–22; Szadeczky-Kardoss 1981, 65, 69–70; Bachrach 1984, 20; Pohl 1988a, 171; Kolias 1988, 79, 200–201; Nicolle 1996, 37–39;

The fact that the “manner of the Avars” appears five times in the *Strategikon* has been regarded as sufficient evidence for the Avar influence on the early Byzantine military during the reign of Maurice. However, the examination of how the heavily armored Byzantine cavalry was influenced by the steppe peoples and the Sassanians points to a number of key changes taking place well before the contact with the Avars or the late sixth century, when the *Strategikon* was most likely written. Having already examined those influences, five major conclusions may therefore be drawn about the “manner of the Avars”:

Apart from *Strategikon*, the cavalry lance with leather thong in the middle of the shaft and with pennon under the head is not documented in any other early Byzantine source or depiction.⁶⁴ That such a lance was indeed used by nomads results from the depiction on the Sulek relief. A notable difference between the Byzantine and the Avar horseman refers to the placing of pennons to the lances. The small pennon under the head, which was meant to prevent the deep penetration of the lance, was a nomadic innovation, possibly introduced by the Avars.⁶⁵ Judging from depictions in Sulek and Nagyszentmiklós, nomads maintained the pennon in battle.⁶⁶ But on three different occasions, the *Strategikon* mentions that in battle horsemen lances were not supposed to have pennons, as they got in the way of tactical movements and of shooting at lance throwers and archers.⁶⁷ Second, the round aventail, made with linen fringes on the outside and wool inside, was most likely adopted from the Avars, as the Sassanian horsemen used mail aventails for the protection of the neck and the nape. Third, neither the iron shaffrons (headguards), nor the iron or felt armor for the breast and the neck of the horse may be attributed to the “manner of the Avars,” for horse armor was known to the Romans long before contact with the Avars. However, if one assumes that what is meant here is lamellar, instead of scale armor, then perhaps that is indeed an innovation in terms of providing protection for the horse.⁶⁸

Fourth, the broad, knee-long and full clothing of the horseman, made of linen, of goat's hair, or of thick textile fabric, reminds one of the older

Luttwak 2009, 275; Golden 2011a, 110; Curta 2013, 811–812; idem 2016, 88; Graff 2016, 139; Fyfe 2017, 135, 137.

64 Kolias 1988, 200–201.

65 Coulston 1986, 66; Graff 2016, 140.

66 See Graff 2016, 140.

67 *Strategikon*, II. 10, 130 (Dennis, *Handbook*, 30): We do not recommend carrying pennons on the lances during battle. For they are as useless in combat as they are valuable for presenting a fine appearance at inspections, sieges, or parades.... The pennons may be flown until the enemy is about a mile away, then they should be furled and put back into their cases; *ibidem*, VII. B 16, 260. VII. B 17, 264. Kolias 1988, 210.

68 Haldon 1975, 22, n. 56; Nicolle 1996, 38; Graff 2016, 140.

equipment of Parthian *cataphracti/clibanarii*. However, the *Strategikon* requires a “cut according to the Avar manner,” which may simply refer to a specific form or “fashion” imitating those in use among the Avars. Last, but not least, the tent recommended in the *Strategikon* has been regarded as of round shape (a yurt), although nothing about that is said in the text. Round tents were indeed more suitable for windy weather, and easier to transport and to set up.⁶⁹ If what is meant in the *Strategikon* is indeed the round tent, it could hardly be the first time the Byzantines had seen such tents in the late sixth century. Most nomads used that type of tent, and its adoption by the Byzantine military must be long pre-date the contact with the Avars. That the “manner of the Avars” is mentioned in this particular context must therefore be understood as a synecdoche (“Avar” tent as a name for nomadic tent in general). The reference to tents has really nothing to do with the Avars per se, while the other points concern innovations and peculiarities of the Byzantine cavalry. An innovation was most certainly the use of the thong and the small pennon on the lance, while one may regard as Avar peculiarities the use of the aventail of textile fabric, the use of lamellar armor for the horse, and the specific clothes of the horseman. As a consequence, at a closer examination, the “manner of the Avars” appears restricted to just a few elements, which are little more than additions or modifications of elements that had already been adopted earlier either from nomad mercenaries or from the Sassanians. In other words, “Avar” is used here as an umbrella-term for everything nomadic, because during Maurice’s reign the principal nomads that the Byzantine army had to meet on the battlefield were the Avars.

The one element that was truly an innovation, not just for the Byzantine military, but for the entire medieval period, was stirrup, believed to have been introduced to Europe by the Avars. However, at no point does the *Strategikon* mention stirrups in relation to the “manner of the Avars.”⁷⁰ The earliest iron stirrups found in Europe are those discovered in Avar-age graves from Hungary, which have been dated to the late sixth and early seventh century.⁷¹ The two stirrups on either side of the saddle offered better support to the horseman, especially when heavily armored, and allowed him to ride and fight more comfortably and with greater stability.⁷²

69 Szadeczky-Kardoss 1981, 70–71; Pohl 1984, 171; Samuratova and Akhmetova 2016, 433–437.

70 Szadeczky-Kardoss 1981, 66–69; Bachrach 1984, 24–26; Bóna 1988, 444; idem 2000, 166; Bálint 1989, 168; Daim 2003, 468; Karantabias 2005–2006, 30; Schultze-Dörflamm 2006, 486, 489, 492; Luttwak 2009, 59, 275; Graff 2016, 142.

71 Jope 1972, 557; Aiken-Littauer 1981, 103–105; Garam 1990, 253; Müller 1996c, 411.

72 Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 158; Kolias 1988, 204; Pohl 1988a, 171; Schultze-Dörflamm 2006, 486; Luttwak 2009, 275, 277–278; Graff 2016, 141. On the typology and manufacturing

The stirrup is first mentioned in the *Strategikon* under the Latin name *scala* (stair, step),⁷³ a name that led to the assumption that the stirrup had been earlier adopted by the Roman military, possibly from the Huns.⁷⁴ However, there is no evidence either in the written or in the archaeological sources that the Huns used stirrups,⁷⁵ nor is it clear where the metal stirrup was invented: the Altai region and southern Siberia,⁷⁶ China, where stirrups are first mentioned in written sources in ca. 477,⁷⁷ or third-century Korea.⁷⁸ Be as it may, in Europe, the Byzantines were the first to adopt the stirrups as a result of their contact with the Avars during the second half of the sixth century.⁷⁹ Soon after that, perhaps as early as the late sixth or early seventh century, stirrups were also adopted in the West by Austrasian Franks, possibly as a result of their contacts with the Lombards, and not so much with the Avars.⁸⁰ However, the Avars seem to have borrowed Frankish-style weapons such as spears with winged points, a clear indication of direct contact with the Franks.⁸¹ On the other hand, in the instructions regarding the operations against the Slavs, the *Strategikon* recommends that rivers be crossed by means of the “Scythian” way of bridges’ construction, which probably applies to the Avars as well.⁸² Another possible Avar influence to the European military maybe the P-shaped scabbard mounting and the hourglass-shaped quiver,⁸³ while any such influence regarding the arrow guide for shooting of darts or arrows (*solenarion*, wooden launch tube) is now rejected.⁸⁴

techniques of stirrups, see Kovacs 1986, 195–225; Garam 1987, 194; Bálint 1989, 155–161. For an overview of the stirrup question in historiography, see also Curta 2008, 297–326, who shares the opinion that the deposition of stirrups in Early Avar period burial assemblages were symbolically associated to a class of “professional” warriors; idem 2013, 812–822.

73 *Strategikon*, I, 2, 80: ἔχειν δὲ εἰς τὰς σέλλας σκάλας σιδηρᾶς δύο; ibidem, II, 9, 128; *Suda lexicon* I, A 1811, 162; Bachrach 1984, 26; Graff 2016, 141.

74 Kolias 1993, 41.

75 Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 158; Aiken-Littauer 1981, 104; Tomka 1996, 128; Graff 2016, 141.

76 Jope 1972, 557; Coulston 1986, 61.

77 Aiken-Littauer 1981, 105; White 1983, 104; Keightley 1983, 285–286; Luttwak 2009, 59; Graff 2016, 141, who records a pair of stirrups from southern Manchuria, dated to 415 AD.

78 Stark 2008, 147.

79 Haldon 1975, 22; Kolias 1988, 206; Pohl 1988a, 171; Schultze-Dörrlamm 2006, 491.

80 Bracher 1990, 145; Schultze-Dörrlamm 2006, 485–494. The role of go-between that the Lombards may have played in this contexts results not only from their migration from the Carpathian Basin, but also from their continued contacts with both the Franks and the Avars. See La Salvia 2011, 78–95; Csiky 2016, 209–221.

81 Golden 2011a, 111.

82 *Strategikon*, XI, 4, 376; Pohl 1988a, 171.

83 See Graff 2016, 140.

84 *Strategikon*, XII, B, 5, 422: σωληνάρια ξύλινα μετὰ μικρῶν σαγιτιτῶν καὶ κουκούρων μικρῶν,...; Dennis 1981, 1–5; Nishimura 1988, 422–435; Luttwak 2009, 274; Graff 2016, 140.

Avar-age burials have also produced evidence of Byzantine militaria. For example, conical helmets (of the so-called *Spangenhelm* type) used in the Late Roman army, were made of four or six attached parts, with nasal protection, and, in certain cases, with side-whiskers.⁸⁵ Furthermore, several Early Avar, double-edged swords with bronze guard and pommel above the grip, are believed to be of Byzantine manufacture.⁸⁶ Such finds remind one of Menander the Guardsman had to say about Avars purchasing weapons from Constantinople in 562.⁸⁷ Similarly, the luxury weapons found in graves of rulers or higher officials of the Early Avar age, such as swords with scabbard mounts or grip cover made of gold or silver sheet may well be gifts brought by Byzantine envoys.⁸⁸ It is at least known that among the many gifts sent to the Avars, there were also saddles decorated with gold.⁸⁹

6.5 Tactical Issues

Much like with equipment and weapons, some scholars believe that the *Strategikon* is the evidence for a major change in Byzantine tactics, partially or entirely due to the influence of the Avars.⁹⁰ It is therefore worth comparing the Byzantine and the Avar ways of waging war, while paying attention to the influence of steppe peoples on Byzantine military prior to the conflicts with the Avars.

The main tactical configuration recommended in the *Strategikon* for the Byzantine military (which was to be adapted, if needed, to different enemies)⁹¹ was the division of the available troops in three, independent parts. The tripartite array of the Byzantine army results not only from the instructions of the *Strategikon*,⁹² but also from the description of actual battles taking place in the sixth century.⁹³

Of special importance for the author of the *Strategikon* is the array of the cavalry forces and it is in this context that he brings up the – supposed – Avar

85 Russell-Robinson 1967, 55–56; Gamber 1968, 22; Manev 1987, 101–111, esp. 103; Nicolle 1996, 37; Hofer 1996, 352.

86 Kiss 1987, 194–195.

87 See ch. 1.1, n. 23.

88 Garam 1987, 194–195; eadem 1990, 254; Kolias 1988, 134; Szentpteri 1993, 176, 181.

89 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI 24, 246; Nechaeva 2014, 180, 182.

90 Dark 1937, 143; Brhier 1949, 272, 277; Haldon 1975, 12; Nicolle 1996, 20; Karantabias 2005–2006, 39; Graff 2016, 165.

91 Fyfe 2017, 124.

92 *Strategikon*, I. 4, 88; ibidem, II. 2, 116 and III. 5, 160; Sarantis 2013c, 190.

93 Simocatta, *History*, I, 9. 7, 56; ibidem II, 3. 1, 73 and VIII, 2. 10, 286.

influence. The three parts of the Byzantine cavalry (when more than 15,000 men) were to be arranged as three battle lines at a distance of a quarter of a mile from each other. The first battle line, consisting of two thirds of the total strength, had three brigades (*meros*) of equal size, each divided into three regiments (*moirés*). Each regiment had 900–1200 men, and was in turn divided into three squadrons (*banda*). The units of the first battle line had *koursores* (“skirmishers,” lightly armored horsemen) and *defensores* (“defenders,” heavily armored horsemen). The *koursores* represented one third of each unit (i.e. a regiment), and were mainly archers, placed on the sides of the array, with the *defensores* at the center. The latter included the selected, and better armored parts of the cavalry, such as the *bucellarii*, the *foederatoi* and the *optimatoi*. To the left of the first battle line were two or three squadrons of flankguards (who had a defensive role), while to the right were one or two squadrons of archers, as outflankers (with an offensive role). Both flankguards and outflankers were meant to prevent the main troops from falling into an ambush or for organizing ambushes against the enemy.

The second (so-called assistant) line of battle included one third of the total array. It was divided into four equal parts and could provide assistance either to the defence or to the attack forces of the first line of battle. It could also serve as reserve. The four parts of the second line of battle were separated by three empty spaces through which first battle line could withdraw, if necessary. The number of constitutive parts of the second line of battle could be reduced to two, if the total number of troops was between 5,000 and 15,000. If the troops were less than 5,000 men, then the second line of battle was to be made of only one part. The “mounted squadrons” of the first and second lines of battle consisted of *defensores*, *koursores*, flankguards, outflankers, ambushers, assistants, and rear-guards. Each squadron normally had a depth of four horsemen, but in some cases it could be of eight or even ten, depending on the quality of the troops. Regarding the armament, the first two and the last file of the first line of battle had lancers, while all others in the middle files were mounted archers without shields. The third line of battle constituted the rear-guard and consisted of two squadrons, one in either side. The *Strategikon* recommended that the attack of the Byzantine forces be not frontal, but against either the sides or the rear of the opponent forces.⁹⁴

The formation of different battle lines recommended by the author of the *Strategikon* is substantially different from the tactics applied until then by both Romans and Persians, who lined up the cavalry in a compact array. Aim now

94 *Strategikon*, II. 1–6, 110–126 and III. 8–10, 168–178; Bivar 1972, 288–290; Nicolle 1996, 30–32; Luttwak 2009, 278–279, 300–301; Graff 2016, 56–57, 63–67; Fyfe 2017, 116–118, 122–124.

is a flexible array of nomadic type, with speed and highly mobile archers, able to provide an effective defense against a powerful cavalry charge against the front, the flanks, or the rear, and to mount a successful counterattack based on the same principles.⁹⁵

According to the *Strategikon*, the Avar tactics was based on a series of stratagems meant to deceive the opponent: “In the battle they do not form their array in three parts as the Byzantines and the Persians, but in separate between them moires, placed in a manner equivalent to a *drougos* [military unit of 1,000 men], giving the image of a united disposition. Outside of their array they have an additional force, which they sent either as an ambush against those who attack them in disorder, or as an aid to the part that suffers attack ... they care for the depth of their disposition and they form direct and dense front ... they prefer also to fight from a distance, the use of ambushes, the encircling movements against the enemy, the feigned retreat with inversion and the cuneiform disposition ... they persecute their enemy as far its total extermination.”⁹⁶

The Avar array divided into *moires* is mentioned elsewhere in the *Strategikon*, along with a note about their internal separation into different lines of battles.⁹⁷ Just like the *Strategikon* refers to *moires* in relation to the organization of the Avar array, so does Theophylact Simocatta employ the word *companies* (*συστήματα*) in reference to Priscus’ military operations against the Avars in the summer of 599.⁹⁸ The description of various battles in Theophylact’s *History* also suggests a single, not tripartite array of the Avar army.⁹⁹ The comparison between the Avar tactical formations and *drougos*, *moirés*, or *companies* suggests that the tactics of the Avars were not different from the traditional tactics

95 Zástěrová 1971, 16–19, 23–27; Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 96–97; Bracher 1990, 139; Dagron 1993, 280; Szabó 2009, 62; Luttwak 2009, 61, 290, 300; Kuosmanen 2013, 204, 207; Sarantis 2013c, 63; Fyfe 2017, 110–111.

96 *Strategikon*, XI. 2, 362–364 (Dennis 1984, 116–117); Zástěrová 1971, 41; Szadeczky-Kardoss 1981, 64; Bachrach 1984, 17; Pohl 1988a, 157, 172; Luttwak 2009, 291–292; Golden 2011a, 94–95; Graff 2016, 164–165; Fyfe 2017, 120.

97 *Strategikon*, II. 1, 110–112; Hofer 1996, 353.

98 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 2. 11, 286 (Whitby 1986, 212): The Avars had equipped their disposition in fifteen companies; the Romans had arranged their disposition in a single conjunction, both from fear about the camp and so as to fight in square formation; ibidem, VIII, 3. 9, 288 (Whitby 1986, 213): The barbarian deployed for battle in twelve companies; Bóna 2000, 166; Luttwak 2009, 60; Golden 2011a, 96.

99 Simocatta, *History*, VIII, 3. 5, 287 (Whitby 1986, 212): And so Priscus mobilized his forces in three divisions again, whereas the barbarian moved against Priscus after forming a single division; Luttwak 2009, 60.

of Central Asia, which derived from the decimal organization of the military with units of 10, 100, 1000, etc.¹⁰⁰

The author of the *Strategikon* has much to say about how to wage war effectively against nomadic peoples, taking into account their weaknesses. The nomads face problems with the dense array of cavalry or infantry, the level and unobstructed ground for the battle, and hand-to-hand combat. If only infantry is available, the Byzantine commander was to follow the so-called *epikampios opisthia* array, if not, then the standard array for cavalry. Crucial for the victory was the open field (allowing for the development of the cavalry forces) and the use of scouts in order to prevent surprise attacks.¹⁰¹ Some other instructions concern the enemy's cavalry and the use of bows: if the enemy's cavalry forces are stronger the grasslands should be destroyed;¹⁰² if the enemy has more archers, then it is better for the battle to take place in humid conditions.¹⁰³ If the enemy is worth fighting with archery, the battle should take place in open-field, to be easier for hand-to-hand combat.¹⁰⁴ If the opponent is a "Scythian" or Hunnic nation, then the general should attack them in February or March, when the enemies' horses are weak because of harsh winter.¹⁰⁵

The united array, therefore, appears in the *Strategikon* as a typically nomadic way to wage war (which is even called the "Scythian drill").¹⁰⁶ Byzantine generals are told to avoid that on the battle field.¹⁰⁷ The description of the "Scythian drill" strongly suggests that the author of the *Strategikon* was familiar with, and had deep knowledge of nomadic tactics. However, such knowledge could have been based on previous treatises, and not necessarily on contact with the Avars.¹⁰⁸ This is particularly true for such stratagems as the feigned retreat, or for the cuneiform array.

The stratagem of the feigned retreat, which the author of the *Strategikon* calls "Scythian ambush," consisted of a frontal attack followed by a mock retreat, during which the attackers, having turned away, kept the enemy troops at

100 For the *decimal system*, see Chudjakov, 2006, 58; Golden 2011a, 90, 98, 101, 103.

101 *Strategikon*, XI. 2, 364–366; Luttwak 2009, 59, 291–293.

102 *Strategikon*, VII A, 228; (Dennis 1984, 64).

103 *Strategikon*, VIII b 48, 288; (Dennis 1984, 87).

104 *Strategikon*, VII A, 230; (Dennis 1984, 65).

105 *Strategikon*, VII A, 230; (Dennis 1984, 65); Luttwak 2009, 292; Golden 2011a, 115; Graff 2016, 167.

106 *Strategikon*, VI. 1, 218; Golden 2011a, 95.

107 *Strategikon*, II. 1, 112; Luttwak 2009, 300; Golden 2011a, 92.

108 *Strategikon*, XI. 2, 362; (Dennis 1984, 116): Skilfully calculating the suitable times, they immediately make use of them, endeavoring to prevail against their enemies not so much by hand as by deceit and by sudden attacks and by the closing off of military necessities; Golden 2011a, 85.

a distance with a shower of arrows, but enticed them to pursuit and, eventually, into a previously prepared ambush. Once caught in the ambush, the pursuing troops would be attacked from all sides, encircled, and destroyed by those who, feigning retreat, were now turning it into offensive.¹⁰⁹ The stratagem does not seem to have been a novelty for the Byzantine military during the second half of the sixth century, as it was known e.g. to the Huns. At any rate, the stratagem is mentioned in ancient sources. Earlier than the *Strategikon* e.g., the general Narses won a victory against the Franks in northern Italy most likely employing that stratagem.¹¹⁰ However, to illustrate the stratagem, the author of the *Strategikon* points to its use by the Hephthalites Huns against the Persian king Peroz in 484.¹¹¹ The Byzantine troops are also known to have successfully applied the stratagem against the Avars at Adrianople in 586.¹¹²

The cuneiform (or wedge-shaped) formation was known since Antiquity. Its use was associated in a number of ancient works of military tactics, such as those attributed to Asclepiodotus, Aelian, and Arrian, either the Scythians or to Thracians. The Macedonians also adopted that formation in the era of Philip II. The pointed leading edge of the wedge-shaped formation offered greater opportunity for penetrating the enemy line, permitted easier change of direction and increased the maneuverability of the cavalrymen.¹¹³ According to the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the late Roman army included cavalry units called *cunei* (wedges).¹¹⁴ There is therefore plenty of evidence to show that, far from being an innovation resulting from contact with the Avars, the cuneiform array was known for a long time as a “Scythian” cavalry formation.

The influence of the steppe peoples on the Roman army are also much older than the sixth century. Before contact with the Huns, the Roman array consisted mostly of heavy armored infantry. Cavalry troops had only a supporting role, covering the flanks of the infantry, or conducting reconnaissance missions and surprise attacks. Since the fourth century, the conflicts with

109 *Strategikon*, IV. 2, 194; Bachrach 1971, 344–347; Nicolle 1996, 32; Graff 2016, 67–68; Fyfe 2017, 123.

110 Agathias, *Histories*, A, 22, 38; Zástěrová 1971, 25; Bracher 1990, 141; Nicolle 1996, 30; Graff 2016, 159, 167–169.

111 *Strategikon*, IV. 3, 196; Kollautz and Miyakawa 1970 I, 102; Bivar 1972, 288; Luttwak 2009, 292; Golden 2011a, 97.

112 Simocatta, *History*, II, 17. 11, 104; Curta 2006a, 67.

113 Gaebel 2002, 118, 158, 175, 180–182.

114 *Notitia Dignitatum*, 41, 93, 13–14: *Cuneus equitum promotorum, Flauiana. Cuneus equitum sagittariorum, Tricornio*; Darkó 1935, 463; Luttwak 2009, 276–277; on the cuneiform array to the Huns, see Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 31, 2. 8, 244: *Et pugnans nonnumquam lacescit, sed ineuntes proelia cuneatim, uariis uocibus sonantibus toruum*; Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 155; see also Sarantis 2013c, 73 (Germanic formation for the infantry).

nomadic peoples, relied primarily on mounted warriors, led to an increasing significance of the cavalry and to the formation of separate units of mounted horsemen and spearmen. On the other hand, the infantry was now limited to supporting roles. Beside the heavy infantry, the Roman army began to place a great emphasis on light infantry equipped with small javelins and composite bows.¹¹⁵

The Romans also learned from mercenaries recruited from nomads the tactics of guerilla warfare, in other words the methods of winning by disruption instead of destruction. The preferential use of the cavalry prevented massive and frontal enemy attacks, while at the same time allowing the permanent harassment of the enemy by means of ambushes or maneuvers, by containment, outflanking, and enveloping, all meant to break the enemy's lines, to cause confusion, and to cut off the supply lines of the enemy.¹¹⁶

According to Edward N. Luttwak, this type of warfare made room for a new military philosophy. He calls that "Attrition and Maneuver," in which Attrition refers to the ideal of minimizing as much as possible the losses of one's own troops (in this case, of the Roman or Byzantine army). Unlike the old Roman tactics based on the overwhelming, frontal attacks of the legions, the new strategy spelled out in the *Strategikon*, "favored less decisive tactics with more mobile and, if need be, more elusive cavalry forces." After comparing warfare to hunting, thus favoring stratagems over the use of sheer force, the *Strategikon* emphasizes the combined operations of the cavalry and the infantry, either lightly or heavily armored, which were meant to break the array of the enemy. The basic elements securing the success of the new strategy were flexibility in the depth of the disposition, the width of the front, the use of stratagems, and the "relational maneuver". The latter concerns the tactical movements and the operational schemes pertaining to guerrilla warfare, specifically prudent, as opposed to bold operations. In short, the training of soldiers and the introduction of new tactics were intended to "achieve the objective with a maximum of maneuver and a minimum of attrition. That was the one thing to be avoided at all times, lest tactical victories result in strategic defeat for an empire that always had one more enemy arriving just over the horizon."¹¹⁷ Luttwak distinguishes a new political concept behind the military doctrine. In direct opposition to the old Roman practice of waging war aimed at the total destruction of the enemy, in order to obtain a favorable and

115 Haldon 1975, 13, 41; Coulston 1986, 60, 70–71; Dagron 1993, 280; Luttwak 2009, 273–274; Curta 2016, 88–89; Graff 2016, 56, 158; Fyfe 2017, 122, 124.

116 Luttwak 2009, 58; Sarantis 2013c, 27; Graff 2016, 169; Fyfe 2017, 123.

117 Luttwak 2009, 281–287, 299, 303.

long-lasting peace, the *Strategikon* takes into account the temporary character of the peace on the imperial frontiers, as well as the need to replace the fallen soldiers, thus promoting the notion of a temporary victory over an enemy that could potential become a future ally against other invaders.¹¹⁸

The gradual influence of the nomads therefore made room for the “Scythian” model of tactics, which was adopted by the Byzantine military over a long period of time between the reign of Justinian and the reign of Maurice.¹¹⁹ Despite their prominent role in the *Strategikon*, those influences were not innovations resulting from the conflicts of Byzantium with the Avars, but the outcome of the long process of assimilation of tactical formations and stratagems, that were introduced by nomadic mercenaries in the fifth and the sixth centuries, primarily by Huns and Bulgars.

6.6 Siegecraft

In the context of the mutual influences in matters of warfare, a long discussion has recently ensued concerning the Avar use of siege engines: could that be treated as equivalent to Byzantine siegecraft, or not? In other words, the question is whether the Avars learned from the Byzantines how to employ siege engines, or perhaps had already known about that even before contact with Byzantium. To be sure, Byzantine sources are replete with reference to Avars using and constructing siege engines. In the description of the siege of Thessalonica in September 586, the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius* offer a clear picture on the stone-hurling machines that the Avars employed: “They were square with wide base, ending in narrower tops, where fat cylinders existed, which were covered by iron to their extremities. Large timber beams were attached to the cylinders with slings, which raised great stones and hurled them. The stones thrown by those engines could destroy every building or object they would encounter. The Avars covered with planks three sides of the square stone-hurling machines, in order to protect them against the archers on the walls.”¹²⁰ According to the *Miracles*, the Avars built more than fifty such engines next to the eastern ramparts of Thessalonica.¹²¹ In addition to stone-hurling machines, the Avars used *helepoleis* (see below), iron battering rams and “tortoises” and protected

118 Ibidem 57–58, 272–273, 284.

119 Coulston 1986, 60; Dagron 1993, 281–282; Luttwak 2009, 58, 60, 78, 399–408.

120 *Miracles* I (151), 154; Vryonis 1981, 384; Pohl 1988a, 104; Dennis 1998, 102; Chevedden 2001, 74; Luttwak 2009, 369; Nagy 2009, 260–262; eadem 2010, 75; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 133–135; Whitby 2013, 449; Curta 2016, 81–82.

121 *Miracles* I (154), 155; Vryonis 1981, 384; Pohl 1988a, 104; Nagy 2009, 262; Graff 2016, 143.

their siege engines against fire or hot pitch by covering them with the fresh fleeces of oxen. The source also refers to crowbars, axes, and hoes.¹²²

More details about Avar siegecraft appear in the account of the second siege of Thessalonica in 617/18. The Avars now had to scaling ladders, stakes, stone-hurling machines, tortoises, battering rams, as well as wooden turrets (ξύλόπυργοι) “higher than the walls of the city,” each carrying a number of young warriors on top.¹²³ The Avar siegecraft skills are said to have been known to refugees coming to Thessalonica from other cities, which had fallen to the Avars in 615, such as Naissus and Serdica.¹²⁴ Much later, during the Avar-Frankish wars in 790’s, Paulinus of Aquileia emphasizes the power of the Avar hurling stones that may crush the body, a clear indication of siege engines.¹²⁵

References to Avar siegecraft appear too in the *History* of Theophylact Simocatta, in the context of the military operations in the Balkans during the reign of Emperor Maurice. In 595, the general Priscus learned that the khagan had leveled the walls of Singidunum and had attempted to move forcefully the population to his own territory. In that same year the Avars attacked Dalmatia and captured the town of Bonkeis and forty other forts using siege engines.¹²⁶ The use of *helepoleis* is mentioned as well for the siege of Drizipera in 592.¹²⁷

During the siege of Constantinople in 626, Avar siegecraft appears as rivaling that of the Byzantines. According to the *Chronicon Paschale*, an almost contemporary source, the attackers set up “engines, tortoises and stone-throwers,” which they covered with hides, and they built twelve big timber towers (πυργοκαστέλλους) “as high as the ramparts,” which they also covered with hides.¹²⁸ Similar information may be found in George Pisides: tortoises, “flying stones” (no doubt a reference to stone-hurling engines), and “mock turrets”.¹²⁹ Patriarch Nikephoros mentions “wall-battling machines,” namely

122 *Miracles* I (139), 148–149; ibidem (146–147), 152–153; Waldmüller 1976, 176–177; Vryonis 1981, 383–384; Pohl 1988a, 104; Luttwak 2009, 369; Nagy 2009, 262–263; eadem 2010, 74–75; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 135–138.

123 *Miracles* I (203), 186; ibidem (211), 188–189; Pohl 1988a, 242; Nagy 2009, 262–263. For the siege, see also above, ch. 2.5, n. 174.

124 *Miracles* I (200), 186; Popović 1975, 490–493; Fine 1983, 42; Pohl 1988a, 242; idem 1988b, 266; Kaegi 2003, 95.

125 Paulinus of Aquileia, *De Herico duce*, 10, 132: Ubi cecidit vir fortis in proelio clipeo fracto, eruentata romphea; lanceae summo retunso nam iaculo sagittis fossum fundis saxa fortia corpus iniecta contrivisse dicitur.

126 See ch. 2.3, n. 55, 58.

127 See ch. 2.2, n. 37.

128 *Chronicon Paschale*, 719–720, 724–725; Luttwak 2009, 395; Nagy 2009, 260–263; eadem 2010, 74–75.

129 Pisides, *Bellum Avaricum* (l. 217–222), 170; Nagy 2009, 260, 263–265; eadem 2010, 74.

timber turrets and tortoises.¹³⁰ The “wall-battling” engines also appear in the work of Theodore Synkellos, together with *helepoleis*, tortoises, caltrops and timber towers.¹³¹ Finally, Theophanes Confessor only mentions “many engines”.¹³² All sources therefore agree that the Avars had the necessary means to take fortified Byzantine cities, even though none of them explains where and how could the Avars acquire the siege engines or the knowledge about them.

In a study published some decades ago, Speros Vryonis asked precisely that question: “When did the Avaro-Slavs acquire the poliorcetic technology necessary for military success against the fortified Byzantine cities?”¹³³ His answer to that question was that the Avars first learned about siegecraft after taking Appiaria in 586/87. According to Theophylact Simocatta, while besieging the city, the Avars captured a Byzantine soldier, named Bousas.¹³⁴ The Avars threatened to kill Bousas, if the inhabitants of the city would not ransom him. Despite his desperate calls, nobody in the town was able or willing to pay for his freedom. In retaliation, Bousas promised to the Avars that, in exchange for his life, he would help them capture the town. He therefore taught them how to build a siege engine, a *helepolis*,¹³⁵ and with that, the Avars were able to take Appiaria.¹³⁶

130 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 13, 58; Golden 2011a, 112.

131 Synkellos, *Homily*, 11, 302–18, 305–20, 306–24, 308–32, 311–35, 312; idem, *Short History*, 334, where he mentions also the bow ballistae; Nagy 2009, 260–263; eadem 2010, 74–75; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 132.

132 Theophanes, *Chronography*, 316 (Mango and Scott 1997, 447): They set in motion many engines against it....

133 Vryonis 1981, 384; Paul E. Chevedden (2001, 75) asked the same question in relation to stone-hurling engines.

134 According to Simocatta (*History*, 11, 16, 1, 101) Bousas was a soldier, but Theophanes (*Chronography*, 258) makes him the town's engineer.

135 Theophylact Simocatta (*History*, 11, 16, 10, 102–103) does not employ the word *helepolis* to indicate a specific siege engine. See Sophocles 1888, 449: ἑλέπολις (*helepolis*): a war engine; Kriaras 1977, v. 5, 412: ἑλέπολις: siege engine. On the other hand, Theophanes (*Chronography*, 259) mentions that Bousas built a battering ram. George T. Dennis (1998, 103ff.) and Paul E. Chevedden (2001, 74–75), identify *helepolis* with the stone-hurling engine known as trebuchet, of Chinese origin, Katalin Nagy (2009, 261–262) believes that to be a ballista (catapult); Graff 2016, 143, who notes that “in classical times *helepolis* denoted a movable siege tower, but in Byzantine writings from the seventh-century onward it almost invariably means a stone-throwing trebuchet”. For further discussion, see Chevedden, op. cit., 78ff.; Luttwak 2009, 369; Sarantis 2013c, 195; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 131–133.

136 On the fall of Appiaria and the Bousas episode, see Simocatta, *History*, 11, 15, 13–16, 101–103; Theophanes *Chronography*, 258–259; Vryonis 1981, 388; Pohl 1988a, 87–88, 173, 363, ch. 3.7, n. 15; Dennis 1998, 101; Bóna 2000, 169; Nagy 2009, 260; eadem 2010, 74; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 133. On the date of the siege, see Pohl, op. cit., 363, ch. 3.7, n. 2; According to Procopius (*Buildings*, IV, 4, 11, 148: Appiaria), the walls of the town were built under Justinian I.

Very important is the note of the author that the Avars till that time ignored the use of siege engines. Some have seen in this story a well-worn trope, according to which barbarians could not acquire the knowledge of siegecraft except through treason.¹³⁷ By contrast, treating the testimony of Simocatta at face value, Speros Vryonis concluded that Avars learned the use of siege engines in 587. That, in fact, was one of his reasons to date the first siege of Thessalonica to 597, and not 586, as the Avars could not presumably had access to siege engines before the Appiaria episode.¹³⁸

Treating also that testimony at face value, other scholars believe that the Chinese traction trebuchet may have been carried westwards by the Avars and become part of the Byzantine siegecraft at the late sixth century. That theory cannot be established with certainty and may be disputed mostly by chronological counterarguments. Among others, the coming of the Avars to Europe is dated in the mid-sixth century and, mostly, the use of the so-called trebuchet is known in China since the Han dynasty, namely the late third century BC, under the name *pao* or *paoche*. What we should first have in mind is that the *Miracles of St. Demetrius* offer a detailed description of such a machine but, as we will see below, is not the first testimony about the use of siege engines by the nomadic peoples who were possibly intermediates for the transmission of the Chinese siegecraft to Europe.¹³⁹

In my view, even if that episode is a trope, the question has not been approached from the broader perspective of the conflicts between nomadic peoples and sedentary populations living in fortified settlements. Taking that into account, one needs to look at the composition of the Avar khaganate, in order to identify peoples other than the Avars that may have had knowledge of siegecraft. The Avar khaganate was indeed a multi-ethnic confederation that included Slavs, Gepids, Bulgars, and others. The nomadic peoples (or tribes) of that confederation had submitted to the Avars before their arrival in Central Europe, while their cultural elements influenced the Avar material culture and warfare.¹⁴⁰

According to Menander the Guardsman, during his victorious march through the East European steppe lands (558–561/2), Baian, the khagan of the

137 Pohl 1988a, 88; Curta 2001a, 97; Wołoszyn 2014, 46–47. On the *koinos topos* in the Byzantine sources, see Garzya 1976, 301–319; Turquois 2013; Kaldellis 2013.

138 Vryonis 1981, 384 (n. 23), 387–389. On the reconsideration of that view, see Kardaras 2005, 53–65; Whitby 2013, 449–453.

139 For the discussion, see Luttwak 2009, 369; Hurbanič 2015, 75–89; Graff 2016, 86, 142–146, where also the relevant literature.

140 Bálint 1980–1981, 132, 136–137; Horedt 1987, 20; Pohl 1988a, 90; Szentpéteri 1993, 233, n. 18–20.

Avars, defeated the Onogurs and the Hunic tribes of the Zaloi and the Sabirs. At that same time, if not shortly later, he also obtained the submission of the Kutrigurs, last mentioned in the sources under the year 568, when, at the order of Baian, they attacked Dalmatia as part of the Avar army.¹⁴¹ The Avars explicitly claimed to rule over the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs in their negotiations with Emperor Justin II (568–569).¹⁴² Some of the people who submitted to the Avars have previously tried to capture fortified cities using war engines, whether built by themselves or by captives and deserters.

Given that fifth- and sixth-century nomads are explicitly mentioned in the sources as employing siege engines, there can be no doubt that they were familiar with siegecraft. Priscus, for example, mentions that when besieging Naissus in 442, the Huns employed beams mounted on wheels, rams, as well as scaling ladders, all of which helped them approach and destroy the walls.¹⁴³ According to Jordanes, the Huns used siege engines to capture Aquileia in 452.¹⁴⁴ In his description of how the Kutrigurs of Zabergan took the Thracian fort of Cherronese in 558/59, Agathias mentions *helepoleis* (siege engines).¹⁴⁵ Speros Vryonis, who treats the Kutrigurs as “temporary interlopers,” does not believe that they could have passed their knowledge of siegecraft to the Avars.¹⁴⁶ Special attention deserves the testimony of Procopius, according to which during the Lazic War (549–557) the Sabirs Huns, who were allied with the Byzantines, built three battering rams in order to capture the city of Petra in 551. Procopius mentions that they did so using techniques unknown both to the Byzantines and to the Persians.¹⁴⁷

Although no specific information exists about siege engines that the Avars may have used before the siege of Appiaria, the outcome of their raids into the

141 See ch. 1.1. Regardless of various assumptions, the submission of the Kutrigurs to the Avars took place some two decades before the fall of Appiaria in 586/87.

142 See ch. 1.3, n. 48–49. On the “ethnic” character of those tribes, see Pohl 1990, 118.

143 Priscus, *Fragments*, 6. 2, 230–232; Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 86; Golden 2011a, 112; Whitby 2013, 445; Fyfe 2017, 19.

144 Jordanes, *Getica*, XLII 221–222, 114: *animos suorum rursus ad oppugnandam Aquileiam inflammat. qui machinis constructis omniaque genera tormentorum adhibita, nec mora et invadunt civitatem, spoliant, dividunt vastantque crudeliter, ita ut vix eius vestigia ut appareat reliquerunt*; Maenchen-Helfen 1978, 102, 155; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 67.

145 Agathias, *Histories*, E 21. 1, 190 (Frendo 1975, 157): Meanwhile the other detachment of barbarians which was besieging the Cherronese attacked the wall repeatedly, bringing up ladders and siege-engines, but was beaten off each time by the resolute resistance of the Romans defending it.

146 Vryonis 1981, 387, n. 31.

147 Procopius, *Wars*, VIII, 11. 29–32, 539–540; Golden 2011a, 112; Pintér-Nagy 2017, 68. n. 188. The Sabirs, living in Caucasian Albania, submitted to Tiberius in 576 together with the Alans and “other tribes.” See Menander, *History*, fr. 18, 5–6, 162–166; Golden 2015, 351.

Balkan provinces allow such an assumption. As Walter Pohl points out, during their operations in the autumn of 585, the Avars captured eight Byzantine towns, "in no other case did the Avars capture so many fortifications in such a short time."¹⁴⁸ Taking into account that the walls of most towns had been built under Justinian¹⁴⁹ and that according to Theophylact Simocatta, in each case the Avars were met with resistance,¹⁵⁰ the use of siege engines is quite possible. Furthermore, in the summer of 584, the Avars captured within a short time some Byzantine forts in the Northwestern Balkans, such as Singidunum, Viminacium and Augustae, all of which had walls built under Justinian as well.¹⁵¹

There is, therefore, no evidence to substantiate the idea that the Avars learned siegecraft (directly) from the Byzantines. The issue, however, needs to be approached in the broader context of how nomads came to use siege engines. If, as it seems probable, that was because of contacts with the neighboring empires of Rome, Persia, or China, then one would have to admit a longer history of such contacts. Be as it may, it is hardly credible that the Avars learned the secrets of siegecraft from a Byzantine captive during the siege of Appiaria. Instead, they must have relied on other nomads of the East Europe steppe lands, who prior to their move to Central Europe, are known to have employed siege engines.

148 Pohl 1988a, 85. On the attack, see ch. 2.1, n. 17.

149 Procopius, *Buildings*, IV. 6–7, 128–129, 132; *ibidem* IV. 11, 148–149.

150 Simocatta, *History*, I. 8. 11, 55 (Whitby 1986, 31): for he did not reduce these cities without sweat and trouble,....

151 Procopius, *Buildings*, IV. 5–6, 125–126, 130. On the attack, see ch. 2.1, n. 3.

Conclusion

Relations between Byzantium and the Avars may be approached on two different levels. While most scholars focused on the political and diplomatic level, the cultural level has been mostly neglected until recently, despite its significance for the understanding of Byzantine-Avar relations after 626, particularly for the conclusion, according to which the two sides remained in communication throughout the seventh and a good part of the eighth century, until the 770s.

Initially, the political and diplomatic relations of Byzantium with the Avars were largely shaped by the empire's policies in the East European steppe lands, and the interests that the Byzantines had to defend their possessions in the Caucasus, the Black Sea region and along the Lower Danube. To strike a new balance of power in the region, Justinian tried to use the Avars, who at that time were in the steppe lands of Ciscaucasia, and, like other nomads in that area, were supposed to become allies of Byzantium. Although in 558 rejected the request of the Avars to be accepted as federates in the service of the Byzantine Empire (i.e. yearly payments and land for settlement), Justinian managed to turn them against the Onogurs, the Zaloi, the Sabirs, and the Antes. The hegemony that the Avars were able to establish over those peoples between 558 and 562, was very much working in the interest of the Byzantine policies in the steppe lands.

When the Avars moved to the Lower Danube in 562, the balance of power in the "steppe corridor" was again threatened, but both Justinian and his successor, Justin II managed to remedy the situation by approaching the Western Turks. That rapprochement further translated into a negative, if not altogether hostile attitude towards the Avars on the occasion of their embassies of 562 and 565. In the former case, the Byzantines refused to give Scythia Minor to the Avars, while in the latter case, Emperor Justin II refused any alliance between the two sides, and pointed out the voluntary character of the presents that Justinian had bestowed upon the khagan Baian. The requests of the Avars had an ostensible character, for they were simply meant as a lever of pressure in order to obtain money and presents, or even the status of federates. In that context, both sides focused on the Byzantine frontier on the Lower Danube as a point of meeting interests. After 568, when the Avars moved to the Carpathian Basin, the Lower Danube region became the link between the core area of the Avar khaganate, now along the Middle Danube, and the peripheral areas in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea.

In 568 the Avars allied themselves with the Lombards, and destroyed the Gepidic kingdom. After the departure of the Lombards to Italy, the Avars established in the Middle Danube a powerful khaganate, which survived for more than two centuries. Although Constantinople lent no helping hand to the Gepids, expecting rather that the question of the Avar settlement may be solved by sacrificing the Gepids, the establishment of the Avar khaganate turned into a very serious threat to the Byzantine foreign policy in the Danube region. A great variety of imperial policies between 568 and 626 were meant to placate that threat, from the intransigent attitude of Justin II, Tiberius' hopes of cooperation (against which one needs to understand the events of 578, the only episode of military cooperation between the two sides against the Slavic tribes of the Lower Danube), Maurice's aggressive policy of restoring the Byzantine rule in the Balkans after 592 all the way to Phocas and Heraclius' policy of appeasement. However, none of those policies produced any substantial results. Avar attacks on the Byzantine territory came to an end only after the failure of the Avars to capture Constantinople in 626. Their subsequent withdrawal to the lands north of the Danube was not accompanied by a simultaneous restoration of the Byzantine rule in the Balkans, as the Empire effectively lost control over the central and northern parts of the peninsula.

Irrespective of the different policies towards the Avars, the latter were never granted the status of federates, since, apart from the land for settlement, no emperor between 558 and 574 bestowed them the annual tribute paid to such an ally. The tribute, in the amount of 80,000 gold coins, is first mentioned in the circumstances of the treaty of 574, which was not about an alliance between the two sides. The annual tribute paid from that moment onwards was simply a way to buy the peace with the Avars. On the other hand, before 574 the Avars seem to have persisted in their request to be admitted as federates in the service of Byzantium, largely as a consequence of their conquest of the Gepidic kingdom. The capture of Sirmium following a three-year siege (579–582), in itself the result of the gradual consolidation of the Avar khaganate after 568, led to open war with Byzantium and to Avar attacks on the Balkan provinces. Because of their involvement in the war with Persia, the Byzantines left the initiative in the conflict to the Avars until 586, when they agreed to raise the amount of the annual tribute to the Avars to 100,000 gold coins.

The consolidation of the Avar conquest of Pannonia in 582 was probably a turning point for the rise of higher echelons of the Avar aristocracy, some members of which began to promote a different policy towards Byzantium. A "peace party" was formed around Targitius, which pursued diplomatic, as opposed to military means to resolve the disputes with Byzantium. However,

the aggressive policy prevailed, as well on the other side. Emperor Maurice was equally not interested in a peaceful settlement, but actively sought to remove the Avars and Slavs from the Balkan provinces and to establish the Byzantine border on the Lower Danube. Once the Persian war was over, and during the ten-year Byzantine counter-attack in the Balkans (592–602), the Danube frontier became the stage of intense military conflicts between the two sides, the goal of which was to control both the Byzantine towns south of the Danube and the Slavic tribes living in the lands north of the river.

Although Maurice moved all his troops to the Balkans, ultimately his ambitious plan failed, primarily because of the inadequate military forces, the constant struggle on two fronts against both Avars and Slavs, the underestimated military capabilities of the latter, the limited financial and supply reserves to conduct long-term war operations, the mutinies of the army and the unfavorable climatic conditions, all factors that amplified discontent within the army. By the end of the sixth century, the Byzantine frontier on the Lower Danube, with the exception of a few sites, ceased to be a continuous and effective line of first defense. Moesia I, in close proximity to the Avars, had already been seriously affected by Avar and Slavic attacks between 576 and 586, and in 590's followed Dacia Ripuaria. Despite all difficulties, Maurice's policy resulted in the treaty of 598, which clearly made the Danube the frontier between Byzantium and the Avars. However, within less than one year, the emperor chose to continue hostilities, a decision that brought a rapid deterioration of the situation. The rebellion of Phocas and the demise of Maurice in 602 had negative consequences for the Byzantine frontier in the other two Danubian provinces, Moesia II and Scythia Minor. The gradual collapse of the Danube frontier followed rapidly, and by 614 or 615 all fortresses were abandoned.

The reigns of Phocas and Heraclius witnessed the loss of the Balkan provinces, with the exception of some coastal cities on the Black Sea and in Dalmatia. This period also coincides with a withdrawal of Avar power from the Balkans, following the defeat at Constantinople in 626. The two emperors, having also engaged in war with the Persians, abandoned all efforts to confront the Avars by military means, and instead renewed the peace treaties by increasing the annual tribute, which reached 200,000 gold coins in 623. In the absence of any organized defense, the aggressive activity of the Avars and the Slavs increased during the early years of Heraclius' reign. The presence of the Byzantine army on the Danube frontier after 604 was weak, and the survival of a few towns until Heraclius's reign was due mainly to their own power, and not to constant communication and support from the center, with the probable exception of the coastal cities of Scythia Minor. The gradual decline of the Byzantine cultural elements along the Danube frontier is well documented archaeologically.

At any rate, the loss of Byzantine control over the Central and Northern Balkans was not accompanied or even followed by the imposition of Avar domination. After their defeat in 626, the Avars withdrew to Pannonia and the Balkan space came under the control of independent Slavic tribes who had already settled there. The area between the Haemus and the Danube (the old provinces of Moesia II and Scythia Minor) was again part of an organized polity in 681, after the settlement of the Bulgars of Asparukh there.

During the reign of Heraclius, a number of revolts took place in the borderlands of the Avar khaganate (see also below), attributed to incitement of Constantinople. The revolt of Samo is dated to 623/24 and its center was probably in Bohemia. There is no evidence to substantiate the idea that the revolt was incited by the Byzantines, because communication between the rebels and Byzantium was likely impossible, since all possible ways of access were controlled by the Avars. Moreover, nothing in the written sources suggests that Byzantines collaborated, either directly or indirectly, with any power involved in that revolt, which was associated only with the eastern policy of the Frankish king Dagobert I.

Cultural relations between Byzantium and the Avars prevailed after 626. This is not to say that there was no influence of the Byzantine culture upon the Avars between 558 and 626. On the contrary, numerous Byzantine objects (belt sets, jewelry, silverware, etc.) have been found in the lands of the Avar khaganate, and many more decorative motifs of Byzantine origin have been identified on artifacts of the Avar-age culture. Those objects and motifs entered the khaganate by means of trade, presents of the Byzantine emperors for Avar khagans, or booty from the lands raided by the Avars. Some may have been brought by the Avars from Ciscaucasia and the Black Sea region. Others may have been produced by Byzantine craftsmen active inside the Khaganate. After 626, the Byzantine culture influenced the Avars primarily through trade relations, and only partially through the intermediary of Byzantine populations transferred as prisoners of war in *Avaria* or migrations from the East. Of special importance among the decorative motifs prevalent during this period are Christian symbols, the presence of which may be explained as mere imitation of Byzantine decorative patterns or as indication of the survival of small Christian communities in Pannonia, but not as a sign that the Avars converted to Christianity, for they appear to have remained pagan until their subjugation to Charlemagne.

The only available information about diplomatic or political contacts after 626 are the embassies of 634/35 and 678. The latter case may also indicate alliance, which suggests that Byzantium sought to have a regional ally in Central Europe. No cooperation between the Empire and the Avars is known after that

date. However, two of the most disruptive developments in *Avaria* took place shortly after 626 or, in any case, during the reign of Heraclius. First, the Croats and the Serbs possibly shook off the Avar domination, before moving to the south and to settle in the Western Balkans likely between 628 and 635. As with Samo's revolt, Byzantium was too weak at that time to intervene in the area of Central Europe, even supporting the Croats and the Serbs would have a move against the Avars. Given the political ideology of the Macedonian dynasty, Constantine VII's claim that the two peoples settled in the Balkans with Byzantine consent must therefore be treated with caution. The migration of Croats and Serbs to the Western Balkans is related to the weakening of the Avar khaganate, while Byzantium seeking their alliance, after the settlement, must have been a way to provide protection of the Byzantine possessions in Dalmatia against possible Avar attacks. On the other hand, Heraclius may have supported the revolt of the Onogur Bulgars under Kubrat, ca. 635, in the region of the Sea of Azov. In that case, although Constantinople had actively pursued a pro-Bulgar policy in the region, one needs to reject the idea of Byzantine intervention against the Avars because Kubrat revolted against the Western Turks.

In contrast to earlier views according to which the Byzantine-Avar relations came to an end in 681, modern scholarship sees them continuing well into the eighth century, primarily because of the relatively large number of artifacts, either imported from Byzantium or decorated with Byzantine motifs, that have come to light during the excavation of Late Avar cemeteries. Byzantine coins of the seventh and eighth centuries may help dating the finds and drawing distinctions between specific periods in the Avar material culture.

The continuation of Byzantine-Avar relations raises the question of the channels of communication between the two sides after 626. Some have suggested Venice and Istria, which belonged to the Byzantine Exarchate of Ravenna and formed the connective link between the Adriatic Sea and Central Europe. However, taking into account the relations of Byzantium with the Lombard kingdom, communication through the Italian possessions of Byzantium was possible only through the seventh and the early years of the eighth century, and must have ceased in 712, when Liutprand became king. Thus, the "Italian connection" could be used to explain only artifacts of Byzantine origin and Byzantine decorative motifs that could be dated to the Early Avar II (626/30–660) and to the Middle Avar period (660–710). However, even in that case, one should not discount the influence possibly mediated by the fairly large, Byzantine populations that the Avars transferred to Pannonia in the late sixth and early seventh century, and who continued to live inside the Avar khaganate during the Early Avar II and throughout the Middle Avar period. Moreover, Byzantine motifs may have been brought over during the Middle Avar

period by Onogur Bulgar migrants entering Pannonia in ca. 660/70 from the East European steppe land, under the leadership of Kuver.

A second possibility of communication was through the Balkan peninsula, and that entails a discussion of the Byzantine relations with the Bulgar khaganate established there in 681. Some have in fact advanced the idea that the settlement of the Bulgars in the Balkans led to the interruption of the Byzantine-Avar relations. However, communication between the two sides through the Balkans was made difficult some time before the arrival of the Bulgars, namely because of the loss, after 602, of the Byzantine territories in the central and northern parts of the peninsula. In fact the establishment after many decades of a stable power between the Haemus and the Danube seems to have been rather favorable circumstances for the restoration of the contacts between the Avars and Byzantium. The Byzantine-Bulgar treaty of 716, which regulated trade between the two partners, did not prevent in any way the development of commercial activity in the lands north of the Bulgar territory. It is to the time between 716 and 756, covering a part of the Late Avar period, that most elements of the Byzantine art, especially that of the iconoclasm, reached the Avars. A brief restoration of trade relations may have taken place during the reign of Leo IV and Irene, but limited, if any consequences for the relations between Byzantium and the Avars.

A third, possible channel of communication during the eighth century was Byzantine Crimea, especially when one takes into account the Byzantine relations with the Khazars. The expansion of the Khazar khaganate in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea placed under the Khazar control the trade routes linking those steppe lands to Central and Western Europe. Despite claims to the contrary the Byzantine cities in the Crimea, especially Cherson, did not decline during the eighth century, but continued to be centers of trade activity. The good relations the Empire had with the Khazars between c. 720 and 760 made it possible for Byzantine merchants from Crimea to move along those trade roads and to transfer Byzantine objects and decorative motifs to Central Europe. Much as in the case of Bulgaria, that trade activity is primarily associated with finds of the Late Avar period.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Byzantine-Avar relations concerns warfare. The close examination of the relevant sources indicates that the elements from one side that the other accepted were limited and did not lead to significant changes in armament or tactics. The references in the *Strategikon* to the "manner of the Avars," although concerning specific elements of the Byzantine armament, have been traditionally regarded as an indication of an overall acceptance of Avar models in the Byzantine army. However, that view does not take into account earlier contacts of the Byzantines with nomadic

peoples and with the Sassanians, from whom the Byzantine army adopted models of cavalry armament, but also tactics or stratagems. The reflected in the *Strategikon* changes in the Byzantine armament and tactics are not the result of contacts with the Avars during the second half of the sixth century, but rather of the influence of the earlier nomads and of Sassanian Persia between the mid-fifth and the late sixth-early seventh century, when the *Strategikon* was written.

Elements of nomadic warfare adopted in the Byzantine army appear in sources earlier than the *Strategikon*, such as the *Treatise on Strategy* and Procopius. Leaving aside the military confrontations between the Byzantines and the nomadic peoples, one way for those elements to reach the Byzantine military was through the mercenaries recruited from the Huns or the Bulgars. The acceptance of those mercenaries in the Roman army was the pre-condition for the adoption of weapons and tactics, which later appear with the Avars as well, since they were also a people of the steppe. On the other hand, a crucial factor in the formation of the early Byzantine cavalry was the influence of Sassanian Persia. Although the *catafracti* or *clibanarii* changed between the late fifth and the mid-sixth century, the heavy Persian horseman was the main model for the creation of a Byzantine equivalent during the reign of Maurice. Avar elements appear only in some parts of the Byzantine horseman's equipment, such as the lance, the aventail, the form of clothing, the use of lamellar armor for the horse, and the stirrup. It should also be noted that the armor employed to cover the head, the neck, and the breast of the horse, such as described for Byzantine horsemen in the *Strategikon*, was also used by Sassanians at that same time.

There is also no evidence that the Byzantines learned cavalry tactics and stratagems from the Avars. According to the information of the *Strategikon*, there was a substantial difference in the military dispositions of the Avars and the Byzantines, with the latter favoring the tripartite array and the former the single one, with internal separation into *moires* or *companies*. The same observations about the differences in cavalry tactics may be drawn on the basis of Theophylact Simocatta's descriptions of battles. Moreover, the Byzantines became familiar with the cuneiform disposition and the feigned flight, two elements of cavalry tactics known since the Antiquity, primarily because of the mercenaries recruited from nomads who waged war very much like the Avars. On the other hand, it is hardly believable that the Avars learned siegecraft from the Byzantine captive Bousas, at the siege of Appiaria in 586/87. The examination of several sources clearly points out that nomadic peoples, who lived in the East European steppe lands before the Avars, had considerable knowledge of siegecraft. Some of those known to have used siege engines during the fifth and sixth centuries were later subdued by the Avars, and even accompanied

them to Pannonia, which suggests that the Avars may have learned siegecraft from them, two to three decades before the siege of Appiaria. On the other hand, the theory that the Avars brought to Europe elements of the Chinese siegecraft and influenced the Byzantine one needs deeper approach, taking into account e.g. the use of trebuchet in Far East since the third century BC.

The political and the cultural aspects of the Byzantine-Avar relations reveal the breadth of their contacts, which results both from the written sources and from the archaeological finds. In contrast to the intense, but comparatively short, political and diplomatic relations, mostly from 558 to 626, the cultural contacts were of longer duration, for they cover almost the entire history of the Khaganate. One of the most important factors for the continuity of the Byzantine-Avar relations after 626 was the trade activity as well as the presence of Byzantine craftsmen and populations in *Avaria* that were bearers of the Byzantine culture in Central Europe.

The Byzantine objects and decorative motifs in the Avar art, as well as the coin finds, show that the two sides were almost in constant contact until a few decades before the subjugation of the Avar khaganate by the Franks. This, of course, does not mean that the Avars and Byzantium were in formal diplomatic contact continuously until 775/80. Nothing is in fact known about diplomatic relations after 678, the year of the last Avar embassy to Constantinople. Byzantium's relations with the Avars during the seventh and eighth centuries mainly had the nature of exchange between two worlds, two different civilizations, the Byzantine-Mediterranean and the Avar-Central European. In that context, and not, in a narrower sense, of communication and relations between two royal courts, the Avar khaganate acquired special importance as a "precursor" for the diffusion of the Byzantine cultural elements in Central Europe, which appear later in the medieval Christian kingdoms of that region.

Figures

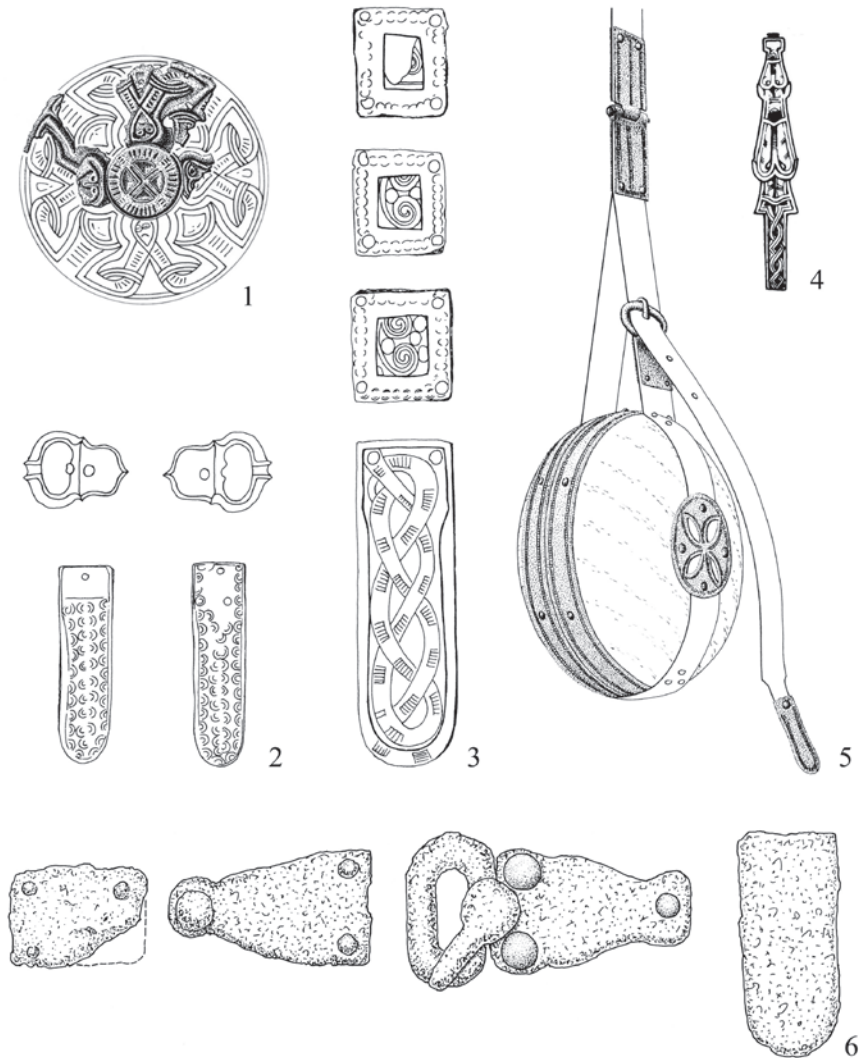


FIGURE 1 Artifacts illustrating the “Germanic” traditions of the Early Avar period.
 1 Round brooch with Animal Style II ornament (Csákberény, grave 283);
 2 Stocking suspender set (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 1188); 3 Female dress
 with mount-studded hanging strap (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 1148);
 4 Female head-dress with pin (Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 85); 5 Amulet capsule
 (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 458); 6 A three- and four-piece sword belt set
 (Kölked-Feketekapu A, grave 324)

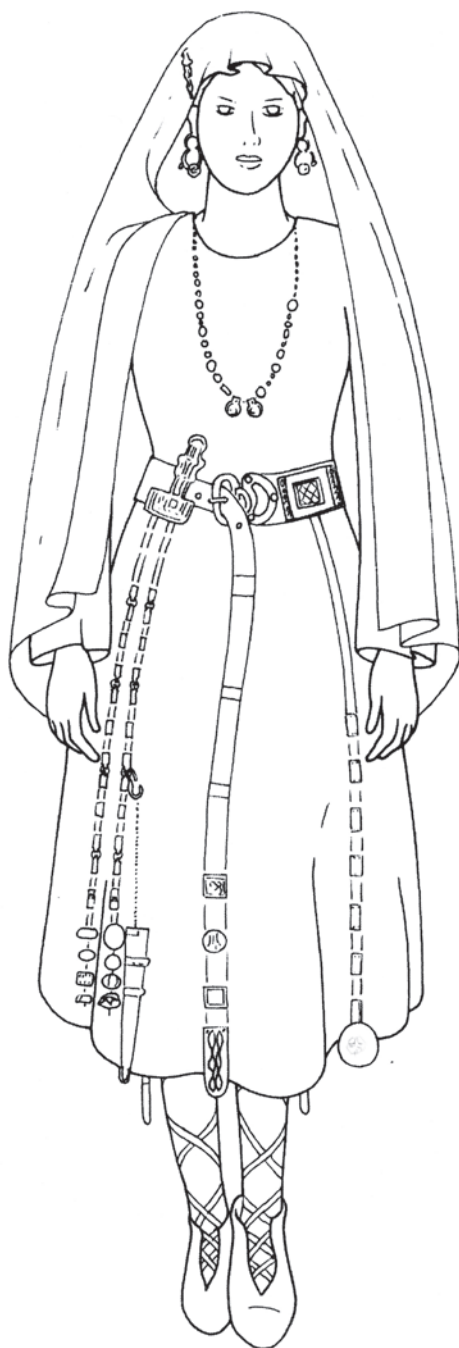


FIGURE 2 Reconstruction of the dress of a noble woman from grave 85 of the cemetery B in Kölked-Feketekapu



FIGURE 3 Belt ornaments of Byzantine type from an Early Avar context. 1 Mask fitting (Leobersdorf, Austria); 2 Mask fitting (Szekeşzárd, Hungary); 3 Cast silver fitting (Bruckneudorf, Austria); 4 Silver fitting with "fringe decoration" cast in openwork (Budakalász, Hungary); 5 Cast silver fittings and sheet silver strap ends (Kiskőrös, Hungary); 6 strap end and fitting (Keszthely-Fenékpuszt, Hungary); 7 fittings and strap ends with "triple hemispherical dent" ornament (Keszthely-Fenékpuszt, Hungary); 8 sheet silver strap end (Cikó, Hungary). Scale: 2:3



FIGURE 4 The Middle Avar women's grave from Ozora, selection of gold objects. 1 Earrings; 2 Torque with pendant; 3 Byzantine cross; 4 Leaf-shaped pendant; 5 Part of a coat fastener; 6-7 Finger rings. Scale: 2:3

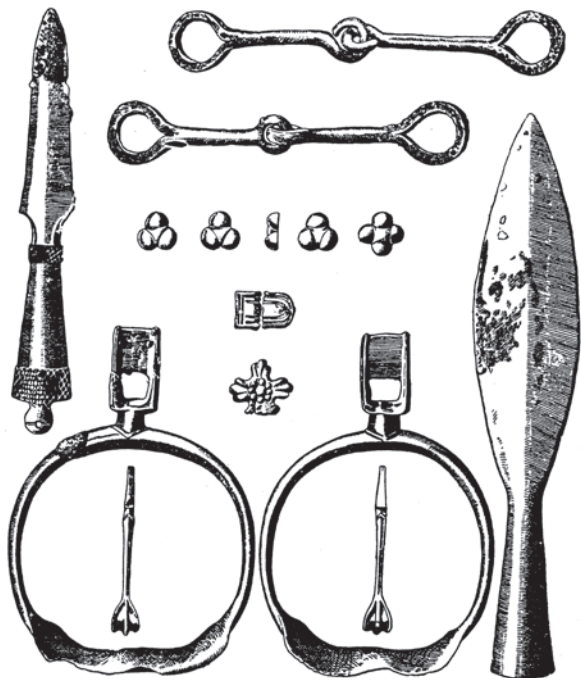


FIGURE 5 Baja (Hungary), sacrificial pit: bridle bits, lances, stirrups, and horse gear mounts

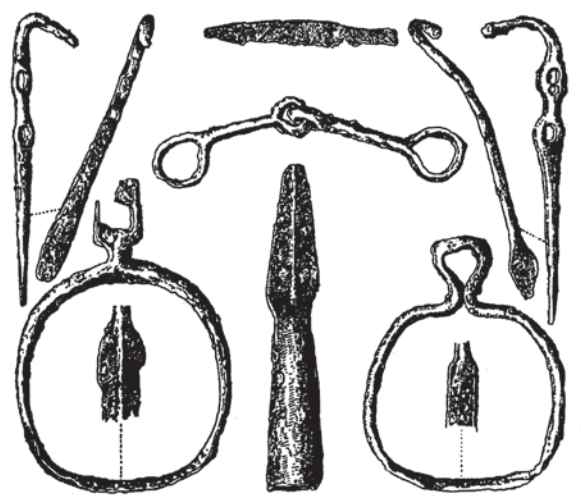
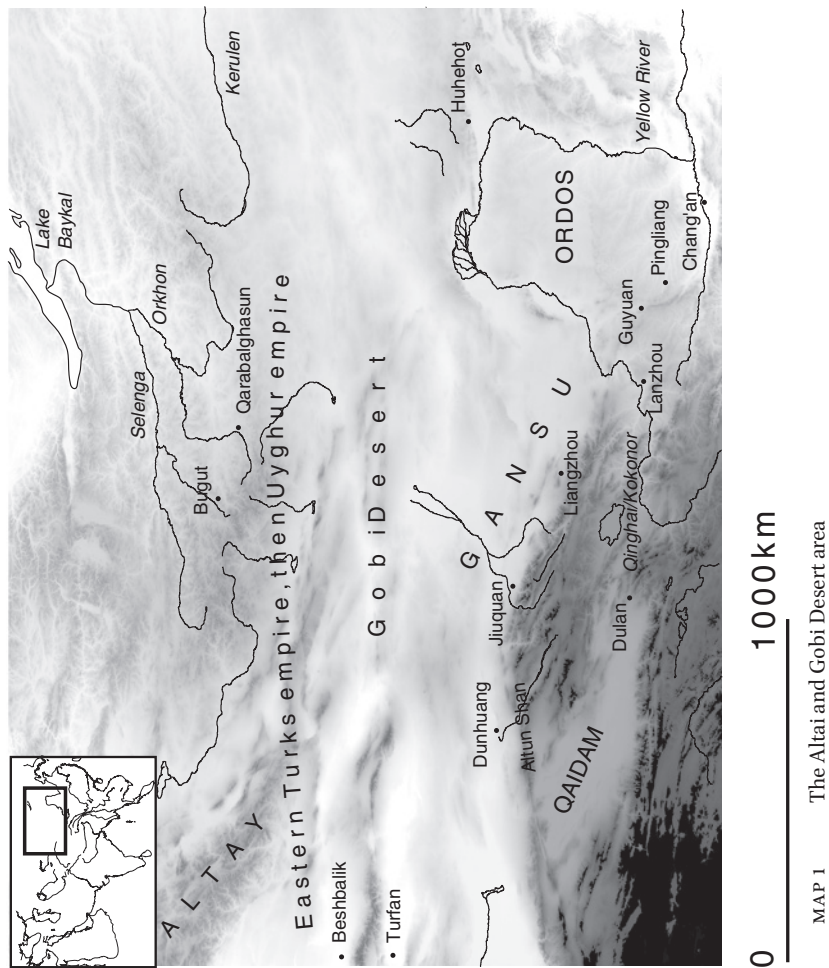
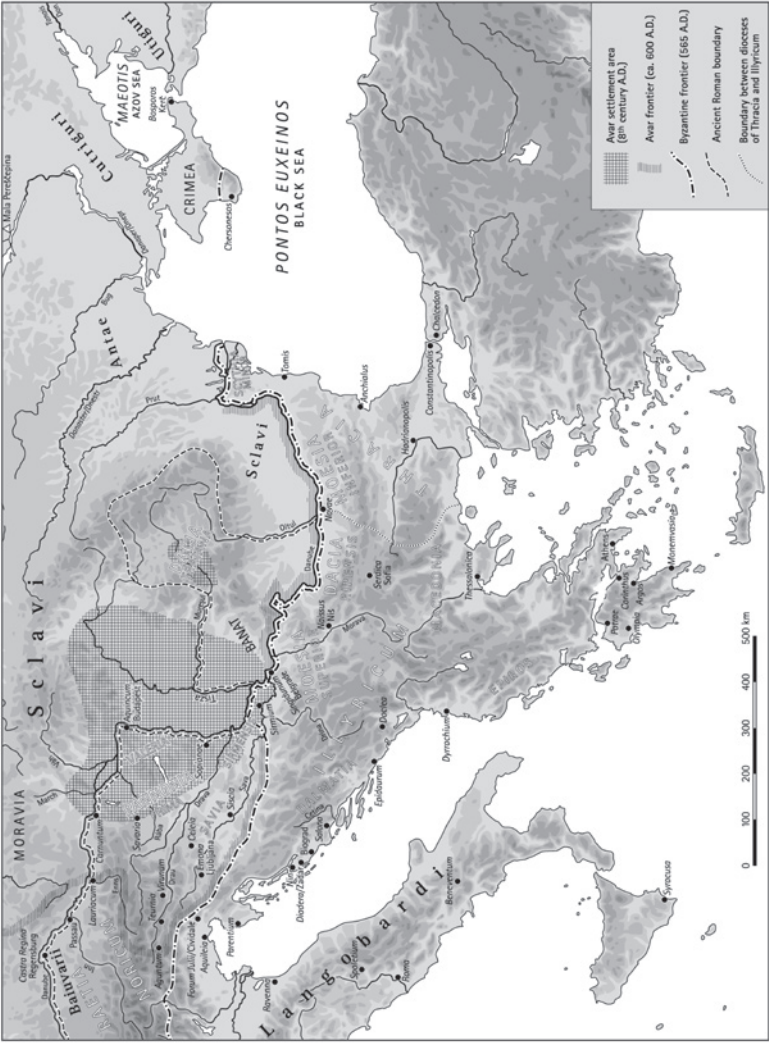


FIGURE 6 Mali Idoš (near Bečej, Serbia), warrior grave 70: bridle bit with cheek pieces, knife, lance, and stirrups

Maps



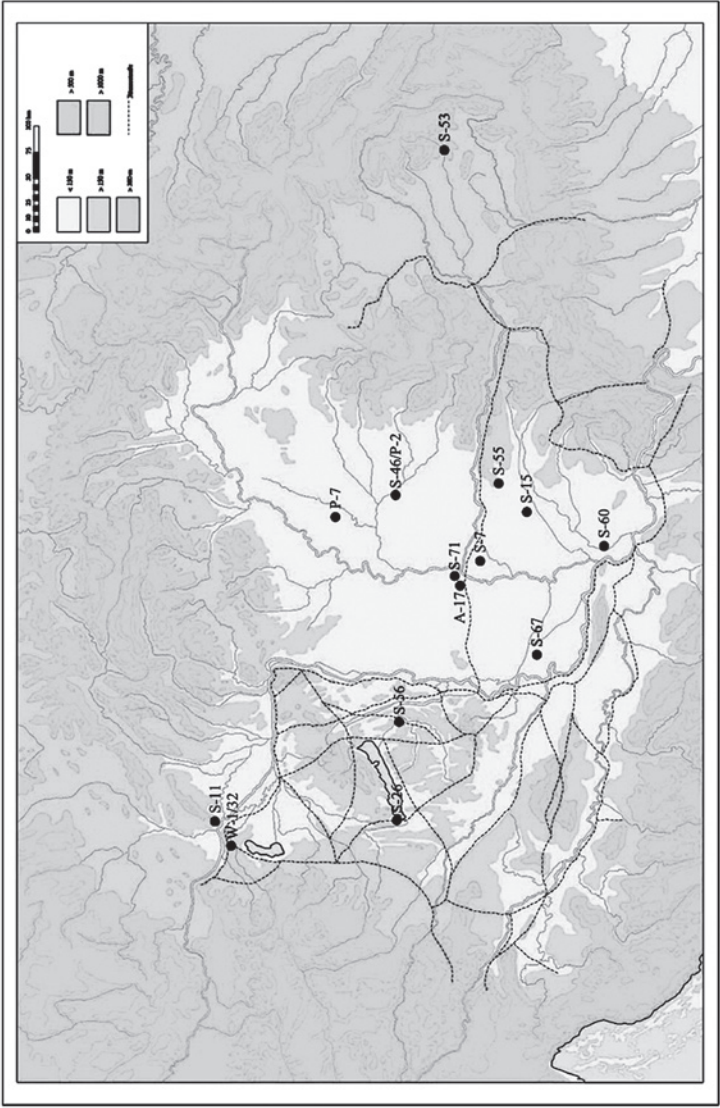




MAP 3 The sites with the most important Avar-age finds

Legend to map 3

Austria:	24 Želovec	50 Hódmezővásárhely	78 Pápa	105 Törökbalánt
1 Edelstal (Nemesvölgy)	25 Zemiansky Vrbovok	51 Hortobágy – Árkus	79 Pécs	106 Üllő
2 Frohsdorf	26 Zitavská Tón	52 Igar	80 Pilismarót	107 Űrböpuszta
3 Leobersdorf		53 Inota	81 Pokaszepetk	108 Várpalota
4 Mistelbach	Hungary:	54 Ivánca	82 Regöly	109 Vasasszonyfa
5 Mödling	27 Abony	55 Jánosida	83 Romonya (Ellend)	110 Zalakomár
6 Münchenendorf	28 Alattján	56 Jutas	84 Solymár	111 Zamárdi
7 Sommerein	29 Bócsa	57 Káptalanlőti	85 Szarvas	112 Závod
8 Wien 11 – Csokorgasse	30 Boldog	58 Kecel	86 Szebény	
9 Wien 23 – Liesing	31 Bóly	59 Kecskémét	87 Szeged – Átokháza	Former Yugoslavia:
10 Zillingtal	32 Budakalász – Dunapart	60 Keszthely	88 Szeged – Fehértó	113 Aradac (Aradka)
11 Zwölfaxing	33 Budapest – Csepel	61 Keszthely – Fenékpuszta	89 Szeged – Kundomb	114 Brodski Drenovac
	34 Budapest – Farkasrét	62 Kisköre	90 Szeged – Makkoserdő	115 Čadjevica (Csadjavica)
Czech Republic:	35 Cibakháza	63 Kiskőrös	91 Szegvár – Oromdlő	116 Čelarevo
12 Dolní Dunajovice	36 Cikó	64 Kiszombor	92 Szegvár – Sápoldal	117 Čoka (Csóka)
	37 Csákberény	65 Kölked – Feketekapu	93 Székkutas	118 Novi Balnovci
Slovakia:	38 Csanytelek	66 Környe	94 Szekszárd – Bogyiszlói út	119 Pančevo
13 Blatnica	39 Csengele	67 Kunbábony	95 Szekszárd – Mocsacsárda	120 Zmajevac (Vörösmart)
14 Čataj	40 Deszk	68 Kunhegyes – Bánhalma	96 Szentes – Berekhát	Romania:
15 Cífer Pác	41 Dunaujváros	69 Kunmadaras	97 Szentes – Kaján	121 Band (Mezőbánd)
16 Devínska Nová Ves	42 Egerág	70 Kunszentmárton	98 Szentes – Lapistó	122 Feinac (Főnlak)
17 Holiare	43 Előszállás	71 Lébény	99 Szentes – Nagyhegy	123 Sinpetru German
18 Komárno	44 Gátér	72 Mártély	100 Táp	(Németzentpéter)
19 Moravský Ján	45 Gyöd	73 Mezőberény	101 Tápe	124 Sinnicolau Mare
20 Nové Zámky	46 Győr – Téglavető-dűlő	74 Mosonszentjános	102 Tiszafüred – Majoros	(Nagyszentmiklós)
21 Šebastovce	47 Hajlúdorog	75 Nagyharsány	103 Tolnanémedi	125 Zálau (Zilah)
22 Štúrovo	48 Halimba	76 Nagypall	104 Toponár	
23 Záhorská Bystrica	49 Hird	77 Ozora – Tótipusza		



Byzantine gold coins struck in Constantinople for emperors Constans II and Constantine IV and found in the Carpathian Basin: Western Hungary and Slovak-Austrian border (S-11: Bratislava environs; W-1/32: Carnuntum; S-26: Gyenesdiás; S-56: Ozora-Tótipusztá); Central and Eastern Hungary and Transylvania (S-53: Ódorheiu Secuiesc environs; P-7: Karcag; S-46/P-2: Békés; A-17: Kiskundorozsma-Daruhalom dűlő; S-71: Szeged-Makkoserdő; S-7: Beba Veche; S-55: Ortíșoara; S-15: Checia; S-60: Sakule; S-67: Stapar).

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